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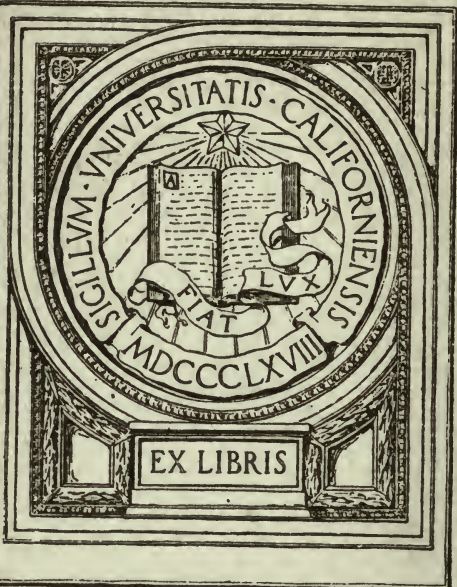


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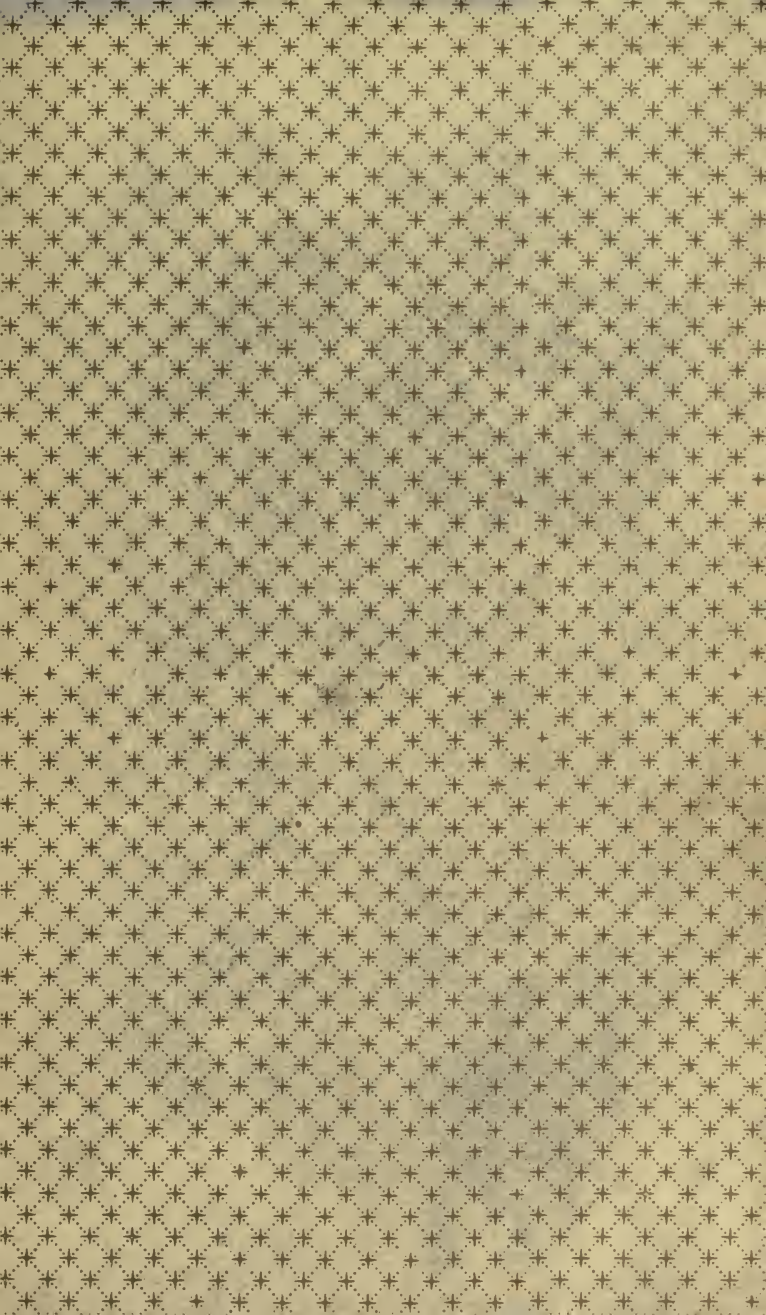
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BRIDAL OF MELCHA;

A DRAMATIC SKETCH.

BY MARY L. BOYLE.
H

LONDON:
HENRY COLBURN, PUBLISHER,
GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1844.

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

PHILAN

TO

GEORGE P. R. JAMES, ESQ.,

THESE PAGES ARE

INSCRIBED,


BY HIS GRATEFUL FRIEND,

MARY LOUISA BOYLE.

MILLARD'S HILL, FROME,

March, 1844.

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IN the hands of a Poet competent to the task, the historical event on which this little work is founded, would form a magnificent theme for an acting play. To such high views the Drama now before us does not aspire: it is intended simply for perusal, and is at best but a feeble attempt to illustrate a favourite subject.

With the exception of two friends, no one has yet seen or passed sentence on the “Bridal of Melcha;” the author’s first essay in dramatic composition. Neither is the name which adorns the Dedication invoked as a guarantee for value, or a shield for imperfection, but is placed there, as a slight testimony of admiration, and gratitude.

THE BRIDAL OF MELCHA;

A PAGE FROM THE EARLY HISTORY OF IRELAND.

Dramatis Personæ.

IRISH.

CUTHULLIN (*otherwise MALACHI*), *Titular King of Ireland.*

FEARGUS, *a young Warrior, adopted by Cuthullin.*

RANDAL, *his Friend, and Comrade.*

DONAGH, PHELM, and MURTOUGH, *and others.*

Courtiers, Soldiers, and Attendants.

MELCHA, *the King's only Child.*

MORA, *Sister to Feargus, betrothed to Randal.*

Maidens attendant on the Princess.

The first three acts are laid in, or near the Palace of Cuthullin.

DANES.

THORGILL (*otherwise TERGESIUS*), *the Danish Conqueror, self-styled Colleague of Cuthullin, but in fact swaying with cruel and despotic rule, the whole Island.*

SWENO, *an aged Bard.*

HAROLD, STARNO, ALPIN, ERIC, *and many other Courtiers, Attendants, and Guards.*

The last act is laid in, and before the Castle of Thorgill.

Epoch, the Ninth Century.

The time occupied by the Drama, is supposed to be one month.

THE
BRIDAL OF MELCHA.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—*Room in the King's Palace.*

Enter FEARGUS and his Sister.

FEARGUS. And trust me so far, sister, in my place
You'd feel as I do—act as I have done.
The heart, whose beats are measured in your breast,
Would flutter, stop, and then begin to knock
Against its prison walls, and cry so loud
'Twould drown the feebler accents of your lips,
Did they essay to speak, 'mid such a din.
The will that would surmount all obstacles—
The mind that would o'errule the destiny—
Ay, that same eagerness which dances now
In thy dark eye, and plays around thy lip—
Believe me, Mora, all would be subdued,
Deadened, and overpowered by such a presence.

MORA. No, by my troth!—by every hope I hold
Of peace and freedom to the land I love,
Were I a man, a lover as thou art,
I'd work another way: I'd gain her heart
With vows of faith, devotion, and the like—
With praises of her beauty—which in vain
You waste upon the wind, that does not care
To waft them to her ear—with half the tales
You lavish on your sister. Night and morn
I'd haunt her path: I'd stand beside her door
To bid her sleep in peace, or wake in joy:
And when the envious walls concealed her form,
My voice should follow though my steps were checked.
Or I would send melodious messages
Of love—of hopeful, daring, dauntless love!

FEAR. Yet tell me, Mora, hast thou never read,—
When for a few short years thy eager mood
Was curbed and guided by the sisterhood
Of Holy Oswald,—hast thou never read
Some sacred legend of a spotless maid,
Whose innocence and purity were spells
To bind, and to unloose? Beneath whose gaze
The powers of earth fell down, and were dismayed—
Before whose modest speech the babbling tongue
Of eloquence was mute, while pious awe
And silent wonder filled the minds of men!

MORA. Ay, that have I, in sinful Pagan days;
And they were heathens who confessed the power

Of that fair Christian: they were wicked men,
Bent on the saints' destruction. Such a sway
Might Melcha wield o'er tyrant Thorgill's mind,
Were he not lost to every sense of good—
Were not his eyes impervious to the light
That emanates from innocence—But thou,
My noble, generous, single-minded boy!
My comely, faithful, gentle-hearted brother,
Brave as thy sword, and polished as its blade—
The soldiers' boast—the aged monarch's stay—
The glory of thy friend—thy sister's joy—
Thy country's saviour in no distant day!
Where is the woman shall gainsay thy suit?
The dull cold eye that could not read this brow?
The senseless heart that would resist thy power,
Or spurn the privilege of weeping here?

[She casts herself upon his breast and weeps.]

FEAR. Why, what a passion's this? Fie, there are
tears!

And one who loves thee will be here anon,
To chide the brother who has called them forth,
And envy him the task of thus, and thus *[He kisses her.]*
Removing every trace of transient grief.
Dearly I love thee! dearly do I prize
Thy counsels, and thy lectures—smiles and tears.
Thou art so full of love, thy chiding springs
From tenderness—thou wayward, eager child.
Art not the same who, but a lustre back,

Would never hold me back. Enough, enough !
I cannot speak, nor couldst thou comprehend,
The nature of that charm which at one time
Attracts me, and repels. No ! Mora ! no !
This hopeless passion weighs upon my heart,
But it exalts my spirit, and I feel
The day is not far distant when her name,
Shall be the watchword to her country's peace !——

[He pauses abruptly.]

MORA. Say on, say on—nor turn away thy head—
Why wilt thou pause when such a chord is struck,
And check the words that fall upon my ear
Like summer rain upon the thirsty earth ?

FEAR. I must be silent ; this is not the time
Or place, or company—nay frown not, sweet,
I am too well advised of what I say—
And see, where Randal comes, with ruffled brow :
Some storm is raised, some cause of new complaint
Has stirred the lion in that noble breast.
Give him a gracious welcome—these are times,
When all the gentler fountains of the heart
Should be replenished. Woman's hand alone
Is fit for such a service of delight.

MORA. Why does he come ? I had so much to say,
To hear, to learn, to ask, to counsel thee !
'Tis ever thus : the idle jesting vein,
The common daily subjects of discourse,

May be pursued in peace, but when the theme
Is one of deep and vital interest,
The thread is snapped, that's hard to join again.

[*She pauses.*]

Why does he look so sad, and yet so stern?
Why do his eyes seek any aim but mine?
I was unkind to cavil at the sight
Of one who seems oppressed with anxious thought.

Enter RANDAL.

[*She advances.*]

There is some burthen, Randal, on thy mind,
And thou dost well to seek my brother here—
He'll give thee aid or counsel: and for me,
I'd gladly solace, if the power were mine.

RAN. Now blessings on thee! 'twil be hard in truth
If darker thoughts dispel not at the sight
Of such a smile of sympathy confessed,
More gracious than thy wont; and yet I fear
That e'en the grateful hope, these signs awake,
Will not subdue the shame—th' abiding shame——

FEAR. What dost thou say—what is there now to
goad

Thy spirit into fury, and to grieve
The souls of honest men?

RAN. Too much—too much!
Yet nothing new, perchance, 'twill seem to thee;
We have been slaves so long, we should have learned
To wear our fetters gracefully, since he

Who mocks us with the name of king, hath set
The meek example! He who should have placed
The sword within our hands, and granted us
The privilege to die—at least to those
Who do account this world a prison-house,
Beneath the tyrant's sway. With his own hand /
He tamely bound the gyve around his wrist,
And dealt out foreign shackles to his sons—
His friends, his children—comrades, countrymen—
His fellow-freemen—brother islanders——

FEAR. Pause, Randal, pause, in mercy to thy friends!
It is so hard to hear, so hard to bear
Well-founded censure of a name we prize,
To feel the heart, that swells with grateful love,
Rise and rebel against those jarring words,
While justice, truth, and reason bind the lips;
In timid indignation, murmur forth
He is my friend—my old and valued friend!
And then to writhe beneath th' inquiring smile
That asks, will that acquit him of the blame?
Will that grand title write him paragon?
Then to draw back, and feel, perchance, your aid
Hath ill advanced the cause.

MORA.

No! Feargus! no!

To stand alone, when every voice is raised,
To bear the brunt of disapproving looks,
And to proclaim the culprit as your friend,

FEAR. Randal, we cannot choose, but love the king ;
He took us, helpless orphans, to his home,
And to his heart. He reared us as his own,
And with his only child, we shared alike.
There was no difference, no distinction made
Between the two fair girls, who bloomed apace,
Save that which grateful Mora ne'er forgot,
The willing homage that she loved to pay.

And had your comrade, Randal, been the heir
Of Erin's broad dominions, and the son
Of him who is a father, but in name,
Could tender watchfulness and generous love
Have taken other forms? Then spare thy friend
This humbling passage in the monarch's life;
The one sad moment, when despair broke in,
And found the soul unarmed—a single fault
Should not obscure the brightness of a life.

RAN. But the true soldier may not be surprised,
And if he sleep, his sword is in his hand,
His armour on his breast. Courage should rise,
Not sink with danger—Mora, I have done!

MORA (*impatiently*). And time it is, methinks, to
change a theme
Distasteful to thy friends. Where is the tale
That filled thy fancy but a moment past?
Has this rich burst of eloquence dispelled,
Swifter than any influence of mine,
The gloomy thoughts, whose cause is unrevealed?

RAN. Pardon, dear Mora! it is hard to speak
In words of tame submission, when the soul
Is all on fire. But here's the tale at length,
In simple language: Thorgill, whom the king
His colleague calls—and we his tyrant name—
This mighty man hath made his pleasure known,
To banquet in the palace here to-night:

He bids his brother—so he deigns to call
The monarch whom you love, and he contemns—
To feast him royally. But over all
Mark this, young Feargus: 'tis the sovereign's will
That all our maidens shall adorn the feast.
He comes—and in his insolence presumes
To let us so far in his confidence—
He comes, to judge betwixt report, and truth,
To see if fame can overrate the charms
Of Ulster's daughters—Ay, so I believed
You, who a moment past, were all for peace,
What say you now? How does it suit your will,
That wanton eyes should revel in the gaze
Of sisters, daughters, and of those we love
With such a jealous passion, that we fret
Because the breeze upon the mountain's side
Dallies amid their tresses as they pass?
Mora and Feargus, speak! Will ye submit
To such a fiery ordeal? Will ye bow
To the king's will in this, if he presume
To ask it at your hands?

FEAR.

In such a case

Mora herself must act as seems her best—
Strong in the thought, that she is strong in thee,
And thy defence, and in her brother's arm.

MORA (*sadly*). I am dismayed, I do confess I am,
For all I speak so boldly—though I urge

You both to deeds of daring, I'm afraid,
I am a foolish, timid-hearted girl.
Yet Feargus—Randal—I've no choice to make.
Alone by Melcha's judgment I abide ;
Her clearer vision, unimpaired by doubt,
Undimmed by terror, will discern the path
In which we both must walk. I will proceed,
Although my footsteps falter through my fears :
The hour of peril were the last, not first,
That should detach me from my Melcha's side.

[*Exit on one side, and on the opposite, exeunt*
RANDAL and FEARGUS.

SCENE II.—*Melcha's Garden. She is seated at her*
Father's feet.

MEL. My father !—Yonder sunbeam on the grass
Has travelled far, and spread its brightness wide,
Since last we spoke together. 'This is strange !
There was a time, dear father, when the day
Seemed all too brief for interchange of thought ;
When Melcha put thy patience to the test,
Drawing by childish prattle on the store
Which love had rendered inexhaustible.
Then in thy turn, wise lessons didst thou give,
Clothed in the language that conveyed them best

To infant fancy. Oh! I well recall
The kind hypocrisy of thy discourse,
Hiding the teacher in the playmate's garb.

[He interrupts her.]

CUTH. Melcha! dear Melcha! speak not of those
days,

For thou wert then a child—a happy child—
A merry laughing fairy—by my side,
Or bounding gladsome on the onward path—
But ever in the sight of him, whose heart
Beat for the motherless, with twofold love.
Oh, Melcha! Melcha! what a source of joy,
A fountain-head of comfort, then wert thou
Unto my widowed heart—there seemed no room
For grief to linger where thine image dwelt
In all its bright expansion, like a beam
It settled there, and darkness was dispelled.
Yes, I can see thee bounding on my path,
And urging me to follow in thy steps,
I can recall the sound of thy small feet,
The echo of thy voice, the merry tones
Of thy young laughter, when my brain I taxed
In coining novel names to lure thee back.
Thou wert my spirit then, my fairy queen,
My imp, my elfin—or in loftier moods
My dryad—huntress—lily of the vale.
Betimes, a sudden pride, or felt, or feigned,
Would claim the princess, from thy father's lips.

MEL. And now those days are past beyond recall,
And all my once loved titles are forgot,
Or laid aside?

CUTH. Melcha, I raise my eyes
And mark thy noble form, thy lofty brow,
Thy stately, pensive, queen-like majesty,
And then I smile, sadly perchance, to think
How ill the name of fairy, or of sprite,
Would now become thee.

MEL. (*gravely.*) Yet, there is a name
Thou didst bestow upon me, with a right
Divine, as that of kindred. Would not this
Become the staid deportment, grief, and time,
With all their weary changes, have enforced?
Father! still I claim the name of princess—
If but a name—an idle, empty name! [*She pauses.*
Alas! could that be pride, which in those days
Asked for the honour, with a laughing eye,
An air of lurking mischief, round the mouth?
And can the feelings which oppress me now,
By the same term be classed? Then, then indeed,
May the same feeling bear at different times,
As changed an aspect, as poor Melcha bears,
From when she flew along the path of life,
Rich in her ignorance of worldly lore,
Rich in the titles that her sire bestowed—
But oh! above them all, rich in the wealth
Of his dear love, and boundless confidence. [*She weeps.*

CUTH. My child, my only child ! star of my home !
The single light yet beaming on a hearth,
Long dark, and desolate, in all beside !
What have I said, in what my thoughts belied,
That thou shouldst thus misjudge me ? Grief and age
Have dulled my senses. I have uttered words,
I know not how—or when. I am amazed.
It seems a monstrous thing, hard of belief,
That speech of mine should cause my child to weep.
But thou hast *still* a resting-place, mine own !
Thou hast a haven yet, from every storm—
A home, where thou from infancy hast dwelt ;
Upon thy father's breast. Come, Melcha, come,
And let thy lips write pardon on my brow.

[MELCHA *falls on her father's neck. Half kneeling,
she raises her head, and speaks.*

MEL. Yet tell me, plainly, clearly—I can bear
And love the truth, however harsh it sounds—
Can Melcha of the latter days, the staid,
The silent, and I fear betimes, the stern,
(A sternness that from conquered sadness springs,)
Can she, my father, in no way replace,
Thy former idol ? There is filial love,
Remaining yet, by passing years increased,
And sanctified by knowledge. There is power,
To understand the workings of thy mind ;
There is companionship, and sympathy,
And there is deep devotion. Will not these
Appease the shrine, on which I offer them ?

CUTH. Thou art my stay, my prop—the blooming
plant

That twines itself around this withered stem,
Lending a spring-like verdure, to the dry
And sapless branches. Melcha, thou art all
That human fancy, in its wildest flight,
Of virtue, love, and beauty, could conceive,
And yet this day I beat my breast, and mourn
Thou art a child no longer.

MEL.

Passing strange !

To thee, but now, it seemed a monstrous thing
That thou shouldst wring the tears from Melcha's eyes ;
To me, 'tis doubly strange, that speech of thine
Should be so hard to fathom, or explain :
Yet, if I pause, and think thereon, I fear
To comprehend too soon,—to find a fault
In conduct, which I fondly deemed the best,
I could pursue. My father, wilt thou bear
A little longer with me, while I speak
Upon this selfish theme ?

[She pauses, and then continues :

Two years ago—

When first I looked around me, and began
To know myself, and ponder what was due
From subject unto king—from child to sire—
When I had reached the height, with hasty steps,
And paused upon the summit, to look back
Into the past, with all its childish joys,
And onward, where the future lay in mist,

Then many an object, which had been o'erlooked
By me—a hasty climber—lay revealed :
Then first I saw how lonely thou didst stand,
(*Hurriedly.*) (I speak not, now, thou know'st I rarely
speak,

Of public changes, which have chanced since then,)
I pitied thee : a king without a prince,—
A sire, without a son to bear thy name—
Heir to thy fame—thy sceptre—and thy sword.
To me, it seemed that thou wert childless.

CUTH.

Peace !—

Hast thou forgotten all that I possessed,
In owning thee ?

MEL. In my own sight, at least,
No treasure : but a bond to tie thee down ;
And fetter thee to home—a household care
To weigh upon thy spirit ; and I cried,
“Had he a son, to train to deeds of arms—
To rear as soldier, and as patriot—
A son—a prince—a man—in after years
To be the pillar of his father's house :
Then were he blest, indeed !—then were his age
Defended against weakness, for the strength
Which he had once imparted, would return
Reflected from the spirit of his son !”
In such a case, thou wert supremely blest ;
Fenced round by filial love indeed, but of a kind
That woman cannot give. Nay, hear me on—
I pray thee, hear me, for a little space.

These sage reflections had their own results,
And influenced my life. From that day forth,
To curb a wayward fancy was my aim,
To discipline my mind, and lay aside
The lighter sportiveness, which seemed a part,
And portion, of my being. My discourse,
And my demeanour I controlled, to suit
And fit me for companionship with thee.
And though I could not follow to the field,
Or stand beside thee in the hour of fight,
Did I not love to buckle on thy sword?—
Did I not glory in my father's fame?

[She pauses abruptly.]

Alas! alas! I know not what I speak—
I wander from the subject. I have erred,
I thought, with all the strength I could command;
Not failing, in my modesty, to fill
A brother's vacant place, and I have failed.
Striving for vigour, I have been morose—
Aiming at reason, dulness have attained.
All graceful gladness—all vivacity—
The charm of other maidens—laid aside,
And none have prospered, through the sacrifice.
Then well the playful child may'st thou regret,
The smiling, breathing image, now replaced
By still, cold, marble.

CUTH. Look into my face,
Melcha, thou art too noble for such arts,
Or I should deem this were a plot, devised

To pry into my heart, and count the store
Of love, that is thine own. Art not aware
That this affection, which I bear my child,
Is termed idolatry? That many raise
Their voices 'gainst the man, who has forgot,
(So they affirm) the monarch in the sire,
The patriot, in the parent. Well for thee,
If all the idle slander, deadly foes,
And lukewarm friends, and rebel subjects speak,
Hath never reached thine ear.

MEL. (*passionately.*) Not reached mine ear!
Why, through the ear the poison was distilled,
Down, down, into my heart, and there it spread,
Mixing its noxious venom, with the springs
Of young existence—withering up the flowers
That bloomed beside my path. Not reached mine ear!
For those whose heart, or conscience is oppressed,
The solitude of night is never still,
And even silence can assume a voice,
To mind us of our trouble. My young dreams—
Through heaven's dear mercy, and my father's care—
From dark remorse are still exempt, the worst
Of fellow-watchers. But, alas! it seems
As if some other demon stood beside,
Watching my slumbers, till they gained the point
Where sweet oblivion comes; and then—and then
He breaks the spell, by muttering words like these:
“Thy father sold his country, and his crown,

Himself, his people, into slavery,
To save his daughter, from the tyrant's grasp.
Thou wert the price of freedom, glory, power,
And all that brave men prize." O speak, at once :
I do entreat—I do adjure thee—speak !—
And with the lips, that never gave a vent
To falsehood, or to subterfuge, refute
The lie, that cowards coined to drive me mad !

[She clasps her forehead with her hands.]

CUTH. Peace, Melcha, peace ! this passion ill be-
comes

Thy gentle nature—wilt thou not be calm ?
Thou art so changed, I scarcely know my child,
My placid, gentle, Melcha. Be it so—
Thou art my judge, and I will answer thee :
After the last defeat, the winding up
Of all the fearful odds in the account
Against thy father, and thy countrymen—
After long days of strife, and longer nights
Of vigil—it behoves me now to speak—
In which the monarch shared the toils, and pains,
Perils, and hardships, of a common man—
During which time, thy heart might beat with fear,
But it would swell with pride, when I was named,
(I had it from thy lips !) in that dread day,
When Feargus, my adopted son, thy friend,
And brother of thy friend, wrought wondrous deeds
In our behalf, and gained himself a name

With comrade, and with foe—in that dark day,
When thou wert here besieged within thy home—
Within thy palace—while we stood below
Upon the plain, disputing every inch
Of ground that led toward thee—when the God
Whose ways must be unquestioned, hid the flame,
Which in our hour of night he had vouchsafed,
Changing the radiant pillar into cloud,
And shedding light upon the Pagan camp—
When victory was the recompense of vice,
And rapine was triumphant—when around
I saw my people falling like the leaves
In latest autumn—hand to hand I fought
With Thorgill, leader of the adverse host!
Fired by revenge and by despair, awhile
Thou wert forgotten, in that deadly strife—
But only for awhile—the miscreant knew
Where he could plant the dagger in my breast,
And thus with ribald words, I cannot speak
To thy pure ear—(Oh, God! I could not bear
To hear them then, from those accursed lips)—
He dared to broach thy name—he dared to pour
His horrid hopes into a parent's ear.
Melcha, the gates were all but gained—a breach
Was yawning in the walls—another hour,
And he had stood beneath the orphan's roof,
Bathed in the blood of him who lived no more
To stand between thee, and thy destiny!

MEL. (*with eagerness.*) Say on, say on! I pray thee
do not pause,
For more than life is pending on thy words.

CUTH. 'Twas then he offered terms: Freedom
and life,
To all who would lay down their arms; the crown
And kingdom should be mine, "his dear ally."
The biting sneer, the mocking, ringing laugh,
I marked not, heard not—passed them meekly by:
I only heard what came at last to bless
My senses with a hope, that seemed of heav'n,—
He would withdraw his troops, he would be gone;
And thou my child, my only child—my joy—
My pride—my treasure! Melcha!—thou that art
More in my eyes, than freedom, glory, power—
Would be restored unto thy father's arms,
All pure, and spotless, as the saints in Heaven.

[*He smiles sadly, and then adds—*

Pronounce! thou art my judge: had I demurred,
What then had been thy lot?

MEL. I could have died
As young Virginia did—Or wert thou slain,
My own right hand remained to strike the blow!

CUTH. Ungentle girl! Go ask the man who rears
A simple flower, with anxious daily care,
Suns it with smiles, bedews it with his tears—
Go bid him break the stem, and bow the head—

Warn him some ruder hand will rob the plant,
Or yonder storm, that lowers above his head,
Will rend his precious nurseling by the roots—
Go sign the doom, stern girl, of steed or hound,
That bore, or followed thee, lest others should
Entreat thy favourites harshly—but at least
In this, thy madness, do not image forth
The thought of thee slain by a father's hand.

MEL. Yet she who fell, was prized as Melcha is,
Her father's only child. Who shall deny
That was a blessed deed?

CUTH. Away ! Away !
He was a Pagan who could dare so much,
And cruel in his valour. I to strike
The blow myself? What ! with the hand that played
Amid thy golden tresses—on thy brow,
Rested in daily blessing—the same hand
That thou hast oft imprisoned in thine own,
And laughed to mark the contrast ? With this sword,
Which thou hast girded by my side, or raised,
Breathless withal, a mimic Amazon !
Melcha ! I tell thee now, if such be deemed
A virtue, I have none ; if such be called
Exalted courage, coward is my name.
Yet this remember, what I did that day,
I'd do again. Ay, if I could foresee
All that has passed since then—thou shouldst be saved,

Despite thyself—despite the murmuring throng,
Who would have been as loud to blame me then.
No ! Melcha ! no ! That retrospect, at least,
Will never bring repentance ; though, in truth,
I little feared that thou, for whom I erred,
(For so thou deem'st,) would'st join the clamorous
crowd,

And pass a sentence, which has too much weight
From thy loved lips. . . . This ! this is hard to bear !
My stock of fortitude is low—I feel
That I am old and nerveless !

[*He hides his face in his robe. MELCHA casts
herself at his feet.*

MEL.

Father ! here—

Here on my knees, that never knelt in prayer,
Save to a Heavenly Parent, till this hour,
Humbly and earnestly I do entreat
For pardon, pardon ! Oh, I am a wretch !
A hateful sinner to afflict thee thus !
I, who believed my daily labour was,
And ever would be, to console, and cheer
Thy days of age and sorrow ! Canst thou smile
Once more upon me ? Can thy generous mind
Forget the words, which shame and grief have drawn
From out the depths, where long they lay concealed ?
Father ! my honoured father ! and my king !
I am a suppliant now—and well I know
That few for mercy cry to thee in vain !

MEL. No! by yonder Heaven!
Athwart whose blue expanse no cloud hath crept,
Or storm has gathered, since we first began
To speak upon this theme—or I had learned
All that this hour hath taught me. I am one
Who deem that woman's sweetest duty lies
In pouring balm, into the wounded heart.

Do not our earliest lessons teach the craft
Of healing? from our childhood we are trained
To minister to pain—to dress the hurts
Of wounded men, with patience, and with skill.
But when we come to mark the deeper pangs
Of mental anguish—when we probe the soul,
And find the wounds that grief, or sin hath dealt,
The labour is of twofold love, that strives
With wholesome remedies to work the cure,
Not healed too soon, not lulled in transient calm,
But gently, firmly, with humility—
For even those who minister are sick,
And need a higher care. Where'er the voice
Of lamentation shall be heard, the feet
Of woman should be turned; enough to know
That grief, whatever be the cause, is there:—
Guilt to admonish—sorrow to assuage—
Remorse perchance to rescue from despair—
And lead upon the path, that Christians love,
Beside the silent waters.

CUTH. Ay, and when
The tones of the lamenting voice are those
Which ye have known, and loved through passing
 years ;
And when the gen'ral scorn or hatred falls
On one close linked by holy kindred ties ?

MEL. Then duty and desire go hand in hand:
Our soothing words breathed low into the ear,

[MORA *breaks in, followed by* FEARGUS.
MELCHA *rises hastily.*

How now, dear Mora, whence this eager haste?
'Tis not thy wont to break so suddenly
Upon our converse.

MEL. Say on, dear sister, tell us what has chanced
To chase the colour from thy blooming cheek,
And silence Feargus?

FEAR. Ask thy noble sire
If we have cause to tremble.

MEL. (*smiles.*) His reply
Would be, that brave men know not how to fear—
I hear it now, my brother. Such replies
Are always made by soldiers: we the while
Gain no redress for all our questioning.
Perhaps it is a false report; perhaps
A subject which my father sees not fit
To trust unto his child. I'll wait his time,
For evil news they say hath speedy flight—
'Twill reach me soon enough. See, Mora! see
How I excel in patience, and belie
The faults which they attribute to our sex.

CUTH. My children, ere you entered, I had thought
To speak of this new care, but it so chanced
That more engrossing topics led the course
Of converse, in another channel. Read,

[*He gives her a scroll.*]

My Melcha, read, and comprehend at length
The sense of my mysterious words. Thy friends
Will tell thee more, if aught remain to tell,
Save that he comes this night. I have no mind
To speak thereon—I should be ill advised
To utter all—or half my thoughts. Farewell!
Melcha, if thou should'st need me, do not fear
To break upon my solitude.

[*Exit King.*]

MEL. (*musingly.*) To-night!

FEAR. This very night! this most unhappy night,
He comes, with all his ruffian band, to feast

And count the cost, and dwell upon the loss
That may accrue : I do conjure thee, pause—
It is an awful moment for us all :

The news has spread, and filled the stoutest hearts
Of men, and soldiers with alarm. Reflect
What a high game is played, when on the cast
Of thy decision rests the future fate
Of all thy sisters, (so thou 'rt wont to call
Our maidens); think of all the homes they cheer—
The parents—kindred—lovers——

MEL.

Feergus, Peace !

Thy counsels and thy warnings are ill-timed :
We must not pause upon the rightful way,
Because the vision, that is seldom clear,
Foresees a rugged road. The onward hill,
'That seems too steep for human feet to climb,
Sinks into nothing, when we reach the base.

FEAR. Ay, lady ! but there are experienced eyes,
Sharpened by sorrow, that discern aright
The features of the land, on which they look.

MEL. I'll answer thee by questions : When the hour
Of struggle comes—when face to face the host
Of adverse armies meet—the trumpet sounds—
The crisis is at hand—what wouldst thou call
The man who cast his weapons on the ground,
And fled for life and safety ?

FEAR.

Well thou know'st !—

Coward, Deserter, Traitor, Renegade,
Were all too good—

MEL. Feargus, thou'rt too bold :
Such language ill becomes thee : ill beseems
It me to answer. As my father's guest,
I shall receive, and shall entreat the man

With whom, (however brief the treaty be)
We are allied in peace. Come, Mora, come,
I've somewhat for thy car. Feargus, farewell ;
Be it your care my purpose to proclaim
To all it may concern : All who desire
To show their love and duty to the king,
And to myself, will not absent themselves
From this night's banquet ; neither by their looks,
Or their demeanour will betray the fear,
That would bring shame on us, and swell our foes
With triumph and with pride. Once more, farewell !

[*Exeunt MELCHA and MORA on one side.*

Exit FEARGUS on the other.

ACT II.

SCENE I.

Enter RANDAL and MORA.

RAN. And thou hast promised to obey in this?
Mora, I fain would learn the magic power,
With which the princess moulds thee to her will,
Who art so wilful with thy friend. Some time
I'll play the list'ner's part, and gain by stealth,
Her mighty secret.

MORA. Randal, thou'rt unkind;
And yet thy words are faithful. Melcha's power
Is great indeed: the magic she employs
Is that a master-mind may well assert
O'er such as I am.

RAN. Here I ask thy aid,
So apt at explanations, seest thou fit
To solve thyself; for truly I confess
That thou art hard to read betimes.

MORA. Agreed!
Know me for one who has the sense to know
She's little of her own; who'd rather trust
Her heart above her judgment—yet not quite,

For hearts are headlong counsellors they say,
And apt to govern, rather than advise.
I must observe on one redeeming point,
And then I've done: There's nothing good or great
I do not prize and honour, that's the cause,
My choice is blest in friendship and in love!

RAN. How cunning is thy answer to perplex
And silence my complaint. Yet I will say
So far at least, thy moods are apt to change,
And somewhat suddenly.

MORA. I'm fickle, then—
Unsettled, and unstable?

RAN. Wert thou so,
I could not love thee as I do.

MORA. Well, well!
I am to blame, no doubt; I know I am;
I seem a changeable capricious thing.
But by the surface judge not, Randal mine;
For, like a stream that wanders freely on,
'Tis coloured by the hues of passing things;
Yet not the less for that, lie deep within
The names I love, embedded in the soil,
Concealed indeed betimes, but firmly fixed.

RAN. And when thou'rt cold and stately, when I
deem

Thou canst not be the same, who yester eve
Upon my bosom hid thy blushing face,

And whispered words of love and hope ; whose hand,
Close prest in mine, lay still, as if content
To be imprisoned thus——

MORA. Well, Randal, well?

RAN. How shall I read the change, how reassure
The heart that never varies in itself,
And finds it strange in thee?

MORA. Oh, thou art dull !
Thou hast no wisdom—no discernment. I,
Who soon must vow to serve thee as my lord,
What shall I learn of thee ? Man's wit, though small,
Should of necessity exceed the dower
His helpmate brings. What shall I learn of thee?

RAN. How dear thou art ! What springs of love
and joy
Gush forth within my bosom, at the touch
Of thy divining wand. I have replied ;
Wilt thou not answer ? Is the tyrant's part
That, thou hast chosen on the stage of life ?

MORA. A little space, a little breathing time,
I ask of thee. Alas ! I know full well,
Ere many moons have circled, thou wilt claim
A sure revenge. I shudder, while I think
How the meek wife will suffer for the faults
And errors of the wilful girl who dared
To have a thought—to lay presumptuous claim
To any judgment of her own. Such sins

Will be severely visited ; and so,
As punishment, at all events, must come,
I'll not enjoy my holiday the less.

RAN. And I must wait till then, to know the cause,
The reason of these changes ?

MORA. Oh, for shame !
How ignorant thou art—how daring, too,
To talk to me of reason ! Am I lost
To every sense of duty to myself,
And to the sex beside, that I should own
A reason for my conduct ?

RAN. Thou hast none,
Thus to torment me with evasive words,
Except, ungen'rous girl, to show thy power.

MORA. And thou hast none to chide me. Be advised
It doth become man's nobler nature well,
To have a reason for his every word,
And thought, and deed. What if we be exempt ?
The obligation is more strong on you.

RAN. When I return, and find thee twice the height
Thou wert when last we parted ; when the eye
That but an hour before reposed on mine,
Is seeking on the earth for plant, or stone
Of nameless price, or fixed upon the sky
As taking careful note, when such a star
Will reach the zenith point, when the small hand
Is busily engaged clasping the gem

That is not like to leave its resting-place
Upon thy lily bosom, or upraised
To smooth the locks that were no way disturbed ;
When every other speaker but myself
May claim a patient hearing—gain replies,
In courteous language clothed ?

MORA.

Then, Randal, then !

How well thou know'st—how artful are thy snares
To gain the truth, so humbling to my pride,
So grateful unto thine—how well thou know'st
How well I love thee ! How this poor disguise,
With which from common eyes I strive to hide
The treasure of my love, perchance deceives
A few amid the crowd, who have not learned
Affection's own diplomacy by heart—
Those who have never known what 'tis to fear
Lest vulgar footsteps desecrate the spot,
Where all the holiest feelings lie enshrined.

RAN. And so thou dost not love me less, although
This sudden coyness, bordering on disdain,
May cause the question to be whispered round,
“ Is that young Randal's bride—can it be true
That those are plighted lovers ? ”

MORA.

Ay, indeed !

I do rejoice to hear it. Tell me now,
Hast thou not watched the lapwing, as she fled
With trailing pinions, and with ruffled breast

Across thy homeward path—a pious fraud,
To lead thee from the spot where lay concealed
Her callow brood, the treasure of her heart?
Look at the miser, who with care avoids
The chamber where his coffers are bestowed,
While any eye is on him—hear him speak
Of dearth, and poverty. And shall I tell
The common crowd where all my wealth is hid;
Less prudent than the niggard—less advised
Than the poor trembling bird, whose instinct, love
Has ripened into reason?

RAN. Oh, be still !
'Tis ever thus with thee. I came to chide,
I did rejoice to find thee here alone,
Unguarded by thy brother's dragon care.
I came well stored with harsh and cutting words—
Rebuke, reproof, upbraiding—I've no chance
In such a strife with thee !

MORA. No ! no ! not yet.
The time will come when I must bow the head,
And meekly stand to hear, and to endure,
Such sweet and wholesome lectures.

RAN. Say—how soon—
How soon, dear Mora ?

MORA. Here I have no choice.
Go ask my brother, sir, when he will spare
His sister, and his housewife, from the house

He will not call a home, when I am gone—
At least he tells me so—and then I weep—
And then he chides—I have a sorry time
Betwixt ye both!

RAN. And thou wilt go to-night,
And wilt not fear to meet the lawless gaze
Of Thorgill, and his savages?

MORA. Who said,
I should not fear? Alas! I blush to own
I spake my fears to Melcha. Her reply
Would banish fear for ever—so I thought
At least while she was speaking—ay, from breasts
More cowardly than mine. She asked me then
How I could tremble, guarded by thy love,
And by my brother's. I was mute indeed;
I felt convinced, it seemed I'd injured thee,
To dream of fear, while thou wert by my side,
To cherish and defend me.

RAN. Ay, through life!
If such a blessed lot, indeed, await
One, so unworthy.

MORA. Peace ! thou shalt not speak
In slighting accents of a friend I love !

RAN. But will the other maidens there attend?
Will Ailsheen, Norah, and that lovely child
The fair-haired Threena, whom her parents prize
With fond idolatry? Will Donagh risk

His black-eyed bride in such a company?
Will aged Unlah spare her fairy band,
Her gentle daughters, to adorn the feast?

MORA (*smiles*). It is enough ! thou need'st not heap
new coals

Upon the fire of jealousy: this burst
Of eloquence will quite suffice for me.
Yes, all our noble maidens will be there:
There is not one among them who demurred,
Or had to ask permission of her kin—
For Melcha's wish is law.

RAN. And do ye know
What ye have dared—what ventured? Is it wise
To stand so hard a test? Do ye reflect
That the barbarian's courtesy would seem
Rude and revolting to your nicer taste?
And will you answer for yourselves to bear
Th' unwelcome topic—or the coarser jest—
The bold unshrinking gaze—or do ye deem
Your countrymen so tied and fettered down
By Danish tyranny, that they should brook
An insult half implied by glance, or word?—
Will Melcha's magic spell be cast around
Her friends, and foes till they are each subdued?

MORA. I'll answer when I may. We are agreed
To sit all silent, and to look unmoved ;
Slow to perceive where an offence is meant,—

If any should be ventured, when hemmed in
By those who can, and will defend our cause,
Should it be needful—but whose word is past
To seek no quarrel, rather to delay
The hour of reck'ning.

RAN. (*eagerly.*) Till a better time!
That thought indeed might bid us sheathe our tongues,
And keep our weapons idle by our sides:
But what says Feargus, has thy brother sign'd
His name to this strange compact?

MORA. He is pledged
To be as passive—as he can—this night.
Melcha, it seems, will play the foremost part;
And all who love her, will avoid with care,
The least approach to strife. It is her aim
To let this dreaded banquet pass in peace—
But see where Feargus comes: now thou wilt hear
His plans and projects, and canst learn of him
To curb thy spirit for another's sake.

SCENE II.—*Banquet in the Palace.*

CUTHULLIN seated: THORGILL on his right, MELCHA on his left. FEARGUS beside the Princess. RANDAL and MORA also at the upper board. Below, a long line of Danes, and Irish; among the latter, many Matrons and Maidens.

THOR. A gallant sight! a goodly, gladdening sight. Thou scarcely know'st, to such a heart as mine, So full of love fraternal, what a joy This scene imparts. Cuthullin, mighty king, And loving brother, I have been misled By ill report, (a fault, I must correct Some future day, this same credulity :) They told me—(pardon, if I show it forth, Now that the refutation lies before My very eyes)—they said thou wert distressed Through lack of fortune's gifts—they said the war (Which had so blest an ending for us all) Had drained thy coffers. Thou may'st well believe With what a lightened conscience I survey This blaze of golden vessels!—this display Of gems, which ever and anon dart forth Their rays, as willing to compete the meed Of brightness, with the eyes that gleam around.

CUTH. It is an ancient custom in our land, And one to which we cling with idle pride, That we entreat our guests, (and those that seek

Our gates, of their own will, especially,) With all the pomp and splendour we command. But your encomiums bear too high a tone : This, for a monarch's board, is plain enough, And very frugal : 'tis the best we have ; And when the offering made is of the best, It needs no blush, whoever may receive, Or give the boon.

THOR. Wisely and truly said.
Who would believe, to hear my brother speak,
His life had passed within a soldier's camp ?
A soil ungenial—so at least 'tis said—
For wisdom and morality to thrive.

FEAR. A Christian camp is rich in such good fruits ;
And he who deems that vice must dog the steps
Of conquering armies—

THOR. Well, young sage, say on.

FEAR. He is a tyrant, or an infidel !

THOR. (*to CUTHULLIN.*) This—I mistake not—is the gallant youth,
Whom you have cherished as a son ? In truth,
He learns his lessons aptly ; and bids fair
To be your rival, brother, in regard
Of saintly eloquence. He's very young
To teach such godly doctrine—and I'll own
(My comprehension doubtless is at fault)
But still to me, it seems his meaning lies

Rather too deep ; true—all your native priests
Discourse in parables.

MEL. (*interrupts him.*) Is it your will
That the young minstrels, who attend my call,
Should wait upon us now? There are sweet tones,
And voices of pure melody, among
The youthful band that I have summoned here.
Perchance, my father never cared to boast
Ours was a land of song—that music dwells
Amid our rocks and valleys, like the home
Of some sweet echo.

THOR.

No, alas !

Thy father, peerless maiden, seldom deigns
To speak on such sweet topics, though 'twere time
He knew my bent enough, to guess how well
I love such gentle themes. Proceed, I pray—
I do entreat, thou wilt proceed, for when
I hear such music in thy speech, 'tis vain
To doubt that Erin were a land of song.

MEL. My lord, your courtesy is somewhat strained ;
I am a soldier's daughter, all unused
To flattering words. I do beseech you speak
A language, I can answer. When you will,
I'll summon them ; they have a choice of lays
Suited to every fancy : joyous, sad,
Stirring, or soothing, peaceful, martial ; more
Than I can either number, or recall.

THOR. Forgive, if I delay to need thy band.
There 's that—I speak it truly—in thy voice,
And in thine eyes, which tells me every mood
Of melody that thou hast named, by turns
Might make itself be heard. Am I at fault,
Or does such radiant beauty blind my sense
Of quick perception? Cannot that sweet voice
Cheer the sad heart, or add fresh joy to him,
Who is already blest? Ay, I will stake
My life—the theme of war, and peace, alike
Were melody from thee. Canst thou not chide,
As well as soothe?—Do not thy lips betimes,
Keep pace with all the angry brilliancy
That flashes from thine eye, e'en now, as if
To prove my judgment right?—no other cause
Could call up frowns, this moment, on a brow
That would seem marble, but for these same signs
Of energy, and life!

MEL. (*aside.*) Peace, Feargus, Peace!
Recal thy promise ere we entered here.
My father, I conjure thee, be it mine
To answer him.

(*Aloud.*) My lord, you do not well:
Calling the attention of a motley throng
Upon a single maiden. Pardon me,
If I impart the customs of our land
Unto a stranger— it is not our wont
To hear the praises of our beauty ring

Upon the air—to open listening ears,
Till ev'ry neighbour deem it time to turn
And give his notion of the sentence past ;—
We cannot brook the bold, unshrinking gaze,
That scans—

THOR. True, lady, true, it is not thus
That maidens can be won : we must speak low ;
With eyes now downcast as their own—to prove
Such beauty all too dazzling for our sight—
And now in daring admiration raised,
With glances more persuasive than our words.
Oh ! we must bow and kneel, and cry, the while,
Against the cruelty of her, whose heart
May long have been our own—speak of despair,
When we are full of hope ! Thou, that art formed
By nature for a queen, and to dictate
To happy subjects, I will learn of thee
All things beside. But, Melcha, this at least :
Experience and success, alike have taught
To play the suitor's part.

CUTH. (*abruptly.*) Enough, my lord,
Of this discourse ; my child is all unused
To speak so much, or to be made the mark
Of public observation. She is pained—
I pray you cease.

THOR. Brother, it is my wish
That this, your hospitality, prolonged,

Will give me leisure soon to prove my words ;
To show I have some skill in that same art
Of wooing, and of winning. Until now,
Ungenerous friend, you have lock'd up your stores,
And hid them from my sight.

MEL. Mora, 'tis time
We should be gone, for we have trespass'd long
Beyond the usual hour.

THOR. One moment more,
I do entreat your company. (*Rises.*)

(*To the Cupbearer*) Fill high :
E'en to overflowing—hosts and countrymen !
I pledge you, standing, with uplifted voice,
And goblet raised on high, I pledge you all—
Melcha ! the Star of Ulster ! is the bond
That shall unite us ; and from this day forth
A better understanding shall subsist
Between the subjects, of two brother kings.

[*They all rise and drink: the Irish maintain a profound silence.
Loud shouts from the Danes.*]

FEAR. (*rises and speaks eagerly.*) Melcha! the Star of
Ulster! may she prove
A light to light us on our future path!
I drain the cup in earnest of the pledge,
And echo Thorgill's words: May we, e're long,
Drown all the mem'ries of the past, and gain
A better knowledge of our stranger guests!

RAN. And may we prove by deeds, not words alone,

How we esteem the men, who this night crowd
Around our monarch's table.

[CUTHULLIN rises as if to speak. Then aside to MELCHA :

CUTH. Melcha mine,
I should betray my thoughts. (*Aloud*) Hast thou no
voice
To speak thy gratitude.

MEL. (*standing.*) Thanks ! thanks to all !
'Tis mine to hope, the wishes you express
As coupled with my name, be not forgot
Hereafter. It is time we should assume
A new position—distance be removed—
And as our guest but now express'd himself,
A better understanding should arise
Between the Danes and natives. . . . Mora, come.
Father, thy blessing. Good, my lord, farewell !

[*Exeunt MELCHA, MORA, and all the maidens.*

THOR. Well shall I fare, if such indeed thy will,
Thou radiant beauty ! Art thou truly gone ?
Thus does the moon withdraw her heav'nly light,
And sudden darkness falls upon the scene
A moment past all sparkling with her rays.

CUTH. My daughter and her train have long delay'd
Beyond th' accustomed hour to take their leave,
Willing to do you honour.

THOR. Yet they 're gone,
And we 're benighted now, for it appears

That in this latitude the planets, stars,
And all the heav'nly bodies set at once—
There were some brilliant orbs I could have marked
After the queen of night had left her place,
And sunk below th' horizon.

(*To Randal*) Gallant sir,
You had a lovely neighbour—lustrous eyes,
And jetty tresses twining round her neck
In close embrace; though slow of speech, her eye
Discoursed right rapidly.

RAN. She is my bride!

THOR. (*tauntingly*.) Ay, so I deemed; but calm thy
jealous fears—
Impassioned lover—for the lists are closed,
And I've no mind to enter; though that look,
That long last farewell look on thee bestow'd,
Call'd up a yearning hope—But pray, be calm,
These fears are far too flattering; and for me,
I must confess the fact, the charms I prize,
Are of a diff'rent cast—the snowy skin—
The golden tresses—the majestic form—
And eye of blue serene . . .

FEAR. It seems, my lord,
You judge but poorly of our powers of speech,
Since your discourse has been this night confined
To one sole topic. True we pride ourselves,
Upon the modest charms of Ulster's maids,

Yet men and soldiers when they meet, may find
Some other subject to command their thoughts,
And furnish converse.

THOR. No, young sir, not here :
For at Cuthullin's court does silence reign
Despotic ; the few shouts and joyous tones
Which break the stillness of these ancient halls,
Proceed from Danish lips : and here above,
Save when my honoured host vouchsafed to speak,
Or his fair daughter charmed my eager ear,
I play the orator in solitude.
From thee, good youth, and from thy comrade there,
Dark looks, and scowling brows, and lips comprest
As if to keep the tongue close prisoner,
Are all the signs of welcome you have given ;
Thy words are all too big to be restrained—
Speak if thou dar'st, I challenge a reply.

FEAR. (*fiercely.*) Speak thou, 'twere past thy cunning to contrive
A question to perplex me.

CUTH. Peace, no more !
My lord, I do entreat ; such angry words
Disturb our quiet, and disgrace the feast.

THOR. Fear not, Cuthullin, for the bond of love
That now unites us, is too firmly knit,
To be dissever'd by a stripling's hand.

(*To FEARGUS*) Come, answer me : an' thou wert set
this night

As sentinel upon thy monarch's guest?
And if the Princess Melcha were consigned
Unto thy special wardership? I marked
The swift discharge of angry glances when
I dared approach the post—a post indeed
That might be envied. Show the orders, sir;
I fain would know what such as thou canst be
Unto the daughter of a king.

FEAR.

Her friend!

Her brother! Yes, despite that mocking smile,
I claim the title Melcha has bestow'd,
And with it claim the right to interpose
When looks and language which befit her not,
Are seen, and heard. Ay, Thorgill, 'tis the tone,
Not words alone, that make the sense of speech;
And had I not been bound to silence, thou
Shouldst long have heard the truth!

CUTH. (*to FEARGUS.*)

Thou art too bold:

Thy love and loyalty do lead thee on
To speak thus bitterly. Thou hast forgot
Her father's presence.

(*To THORGILL*) Yet another cup—
The wine is gaily dancing to the brim,
As if to woo you.

THOR. There's one only name
That I will pledge this night.

(To FEARGUS, bitterly) Your sister, sir!

[FEARGUS rises and drinks, without reply. RANDAL
rises and addresses FEARGUS.

RAN. Feargus, to both thy sisters, and thyself!

FEAR. My gallant friend, we're wanting in our love
And duty to our king. Fill high the cup,
And let us deem the wine-juice is the blood
Of hated foes, and drain it to the dregs.
I pledge you all—guests, countrymen, and friends—
The Father of his people—Erin's King!

Mingled shouts of the Irish and Danes.

SCENE III.—*Apartment in the Palace.*

Enter the two Kings.

THOR. Time! time for what? We are alone at
length;
There is no further need to bow and smile,
And call each other loving courteous names,
When, on thy side at least Cuthullin, reigns
The deadliest hate that ever filled the breast
Of vanquish'd towards the victor. Well we played

CUTH. Thou hast dwelt long enough within the
land,
To learn what is forbidden by our faith ;
To know an insult is implied by him
Who dares to ask a Christian maiden's hand,
Himself a wedded husband.

THOR. (*smiles.*) 'Tis not thus
With thy allies; a more convenient creed
The Danes profess; but so far will I yield
To Melcha's scruples. Gundred's fate shall be
At her disposal: if she care to have
The daughter of a royal house, and one
Who shared a throne, to wait and minister
Unto her slightest wish, to stand beside
As her attendant, menial, whatsoe'er
My youthful bride appoint, then be it so.
Or if her rival's presence should afflict
Thy daughter's gentle heart, then, far removed,
Gundred no more shall enter on the scene—
Her very name shall be forgotten.

CUTH. Hold!
Thy words are idle; such ignoble terms,
Cruel as base, Melcha would never hear!
Thou dost not know the spirit of my child;
Thou hast but marked her beauty with thine eyes;
But, Thorgill, there's a beauty of the mind,
And of the heart, beyond thy mental ken.

THOR. (*bitterly.*) This courtesy is scanty, noble friend!
But faithful lovers cavil not at praise
Of her, they love, e'en at their own expense.
The charms of which you speak, are not display'd
In one short interview; yet there'll be time
In the long years of both our future lives

THOR. Ay, would they so!
Tempt me no farther, if thou hast a care

For Melcha's destiny ! 'Tis well to speak
Of what her countrymen would do and dare
In her behalf; count up the martial hosts—
Go call the muster-roll, and see what troops
Would crowd around thy standard. Mighty chief!
The train of my attendants on this day,
Would challenge all thy armies to the field.
Thy coffers are exhausted, and my name
Rings like a knell throughout the land. No bribes
Hast thou to make, and threats were vain with those
Whom panic has already seized. Thou know'st
I speak advisedly; once more I set
The choice before thee—shall I lead away
My bride in pomp and honour, as befits
A monarch's spouse, or shall I give the word,
The one short word, that will consign thy name
Unto dishonour ?

CUTH. Softly, for she comes.
Thou must be silent now; thou wouldst not dare
To speak insulting words—imply one thought
That borders upon ill, when she is near.

THOR. (*musingly.*) Her simple garb becomes her
 beauty well,
Never were grace and modesty so linked
In any human creature.

CUTH. There's no fear,
For purity adorns her, like the crown

That played around the martyred Virgin's head,
And cast its brightness on her murd'ers—Thou,
Base, cruel, as thou art—e'en thou must catch
Some portion of that light.

Enter MELCHA.

MEL. Father, I come,
Unbidden it is true, yet as I passed
Some distance hence, the tones of thy dear voice
Were borne upon the wind, and then methought
In angry accents did our guest reply.
It was not thus, my lord, you spake but now
Together at the banquet—what has chanced—
What theme have you preferred, to anger both?

THOR. Melcha, of thee we spake, the fault is thine,
The torch of discord kindled at thy name.

MEL. That is not well, a woman's name should be
The harbinger of peace ; her feeble hand
Should throw the warder down, when strife assumes
A threat'ning aspect, and her words should fall
Like oil upon the Ocean.

THOR. Gentle sage !
Thy wisdom is convey'd in silver tones,
But such, wilt pardon me, is not the code
By which the sex is govern'd. Pause and say,
Have ye not been the spring of woe and strife—
Bloodshed and hatred—since the world began ?
Are there not names—soft, sweet, melodious names,

Whose very sound is feminine—that have
Become a nation's war-cry?

MEL. Ay ! in truth
'Tis somewhat rash to mind us of our pow'r !
But good, my lord, in that I spake but now,
It was of daily circumstance, of life,
Beneath its common aspect ; there are times
Which lend their spirit to the timid breast—
Which nerve the feeblest hand, the faintest heart—
Which bid us quit the native air of home !

THOR. And then, Heav'n help your foes! the
sternest man,
Whose name for cruelty has spread abroad,
Is meek, and gentle, when compared with her
Who lays aside her nature.

MEL. (*solemnly.*) Woe to them
Who thereunto compel her !—those who urge
Her footsteps o'er the threshold of her home,
And bid her quit the gentler cares of life,
'Tis like enough her mercy will be small !
An even path is quietly pursued,
But when a chasm lies before us, we
Call forth our powers, and with an effort clear
The yawning gulf—then oftentimes the spring
Carries us farther, than we deemed.

THOR. (*To CUTHULLIN.*) Thou'rt right,
Her mental charms are worthy of the form

In which they are embodied. Thou saidst well,
And very truly.

CUTH. (*To MELCHA, with agitation.*) Wherefore didst
thou come,
We did not call for thee; subjects there are
Of grave and stern importance, all unfit
For a young maiden's ear. Away! begone!

THOR. Nay, churlish father! she shall not obey
Thy bidding. That of which we spake, but now,
Is destined for thy ear—thy thoughts—thy heart—
I woo thee as my bride and queen! I waive
All mem'ry of dissension, I demand
No dower with thee, no treasure but thyself.
Melcha, I bid thee share the throne of him
Who has subdued thy country, and in turn
Is vanquish'd by thy beauty. Thou shalt be
A monarch's bride! but to thy lofty soul,
Still dearer than the title of a king,
A warrior, and a victor sues to thee.

CUTH. (*hastily.*) Wilt thou stand there, to hear him
speak such words?
Melcha, begone! I tremble while I see
The answer quivering on thy lip, the thoughts
That swell thy maiden heart, and fire thine eye—
He shall not stay thee! Oh! begone my child!
Have pity on thy father, and thyself!
Speak not, I do adjure thee—for the tones

Of pious indignation will expose
Thine ear, thy modest ear, to hateful words—
Wilt thou begone?

THOR. Does not her calmness shame
Thy idle fury? She has heard my suit,
And Melcha will reply, in such a guise
As shall disarm my bosom of the rage
Her sire has raised.

MEL. My lord, it cannot be!
Our creeds, our countries differ; there's no tie
Of sympathy between us, and as yet
Ambition never was a snare for me.
Thou art a warrior, and a king, indeed,
But still an alien, and the blessed faith
In which I have been nurtured, doth forbid
To yoke with unbelievers.

THOR. Thou art rash,
Melcha, to speak so calmly, with an air
Of self-possession, that becomes thee not;
When every tone adds fuel to the fire
Thy charms have kindled, thou art mad to brave
My fury, with thy scorn!

MEL. And thou unjust;
For my reply was couched in courteous terms,
And bore no signs of scorn.

THOR. Calm were thy words,
But bitter meaning lies within the smile—
And every line of symmetry betrays

An inward indignation. Think not thus
To stay the current of my passion. Thou
Art doubly valued, being hard to gain ;
And doubly beautiful unto these eyes,
When towering with disdain. Thou haughty girl !
Is not one crown sufficient for thy head ?
We'll add thy father's then. Come, pause awhile,
And be advised, now thou hast play'd the part,
Which every maiden owes unto herself—
And drest thy features in becoming garb—
And uttered words which do belie thy thoughts—
I'm all thine own, there need no graceful wiles,
To bind me in thy meshes.

MEL. In good truth
You do misjudge me ; I've no wish, nor power,
To bind, or to unloose, and so, my lord,
I trust you will forget, and pardon me—
My coming was ill-timed.

THOR. Thou art not gone,
Thou shalt not leave me. No ! for thou art mine !
Ay, Melcha, thou art mine !—there lives no power
That shall divide us. Be content to hear
A suit preferred in honour—for I take
My gods, and thine, to witness, it were well
The choice were quickly made. Dost thou believe
That a few words from girlish lips can turn
Me from my purpose ? I, who never swerv'd
Throughout a conqueror's life in my pursuit ?

Poor maiden! 'twere as easy to arrest
The headlong course of armies, by thy voice!
Recal thyself, it seems thou hast forgot
With whom thou hast to deal; the gentle mood
I have assumed to humour thee, misleads
And blinds thy fancy. Dost thou know me?

MEL. (*with majesty.*)

Well!

Thou art the man who turn'd this fertile isle
Into a desert; made our freemen slaves;
And changed the crown of gold, Cuthullin wore
To paltry tinsel. Thou art come to fill
Brave men with fear, by striking those they love;
And gain a woman's heart, by coward threats!

[CUTHULLIN *interposes between them.*]

CUTH. Approach her at thy peril! for the ground
On which she stands, is sacred. Bow thine eyes
That glow with lawless passion—none but thou
Would be unmoved in such a presence. Call
Thy slaves around thee—there will not be found
One man to do thy bidding, when they look
Upon my sainted child.

THOR. (*To MELCHA.*) Thy folly breeds
Compassion; yet once more I bid thee pause,
Ere I pronounce thy doom. Dost thou not fear
To have thy haughty spirit bowed below
The common level—to become a thing
For scorn, to point at. There are few degrees

MEL. Thorgill, there is no cause for fear; my friends,
Guessing my need of their protection, came
To give me courage, not to injure thee.

FEAR. Speak but the word, Cuthullin! Melcha,
speak!

And we will bow the tyrant to your feet,
And make him cry for pardon. Say the word,
And we will dye the floors with Danish blood,
And make his mother childless!

[*Movement of the Irish and Danes, CUTHULLIN interposes.*]

CUTH. On thy life—
On thy allegiance—Feargus, sheath the sword,
And let them pass in peace! They are our guests,
And in that name is safety. [Waves his people back.]

THOR. Hear me once
Before I cross the threshold: Melcha's taunt,
And her young champion's threats, I pass them by,
They are beneath my anger—but beware
Of this day's retribution!

(To MELCHA) Wilt thou hear,
For the last time, the terms I offer thee,
Thy father, and his people.

MEL. For myself
I'll yield a patient hearing; but one prayer
I earnestly prefer: let not your words
Breathe rage, and fury, in the hearts of those

Who stand around thee ; good, my lord, I pray,
Put not their eager spirits to a test
Which may be hard to bear. And you, dear friends,
I do conjure ye all, let this our guest
Speak unmolested.

THOR. Wilt thou be my bride ?
And from the throne which thou shalt share with me,
Dispense thy blessings to the country round,
And heal the wounds which war and rapine made,
Within the land thou lov'st ? Wilt thou unite
Two brave and warlike nations, with the bond
Of lasting peace . . . and reign with gentle sway
O'er kingdom, and o'er king ?

MEL. Say on, my lord.
If, with humility, I do reject
This royal offer, what were the result
To me, and mine ?

THOR. Then—by the gods above—
By every oath that's binding to the soul—
Whatever be the creed—I'll carry fire,
And sword, throughout the land thou lov'st so well.
That which has chanced till now, shall seem as nought
Compared with all the carnage that's to come.
Thine be the guilt!—no quarter for thy sake !
The cries of aged men, and tender girls—
The smoke of ruined cities—shall arise
As witness, 'gainst thy cruelty, to Heaven :

And widowed mothers, with their dying breath,
Shall link thy name with curses—till it spread
Into a hateful echo ! For thy sire—
Oh, fear not for his life—that shall be spared—
'Twere well Cuthullin should survive to see,
And know thee mine at last—mine, through the means
Of sterner wooing, than I tried but now—
I had forgot—I must respect thy prayer,
And so I wait thy answer.

FEAR.

Speak at once ;

And tell him, thou art guarded by a love,
That lends its godlike strength to feeble things.
I will not speak of fear, for on thy brow
Sits calm defiance—gentle courage. Thou—
Whom all would die to save—shalt thou be made
A sacrifice for us ? Believe him not !
He has no power to work his wicked will,
Against the Lord's anointed.

CUTH.

Melcha, speak !

And tell him, we will die in thy defence,
And in our country's service. Now begone :
Thy cheek is pale—thine eye is all too bright ;
Good Mora, bear her hence.

MEL.

I must reply !—

I 'm pledged to answer ! Such a change as this—
So sudden, and unlooked for—will require
Some intervening space. How long wouldst thou—

Between the wooing, and the nuptials—grant
Unto my prayers ?

THOR. The moon is at her full.
Her rays upon my distant palace shine ;
And the encircling lake this night appears
A flood of molten silver. Melcha's path,
Unto her future home, should be across
That track of light. Till next the moon appears
In equal lustre, I will wait my bride :
But not one day beyond.

MEL. I will be there !

CUTH. Hush, Melcha, hush ! thou know'st not
 what thou sayst—
Thy reason is unsettled.

MEL. Father, no !
I will not fail at th' appointed hour.
One only boon I ask : I fain would have
Companions in my exile—sister friends,
Maidens, who speak my language, and with whom
I may recal our distant home. My lord,
A train of youthful beauties at your court,
Could scarcely be unwelcome ?

THOR. Dost thou strive
To blind my sense ? Melcha, wouldst thou deceive
Thy lover with false hopes ?

MEL. I swear to thee,
By all I hold most sacred, I will come
Upon the night appointed ! until then,
Leave me to finish, all that now remains
Of filial duty.

THOR. Danes, behold your queen !

[Shouts of the Danes.]

ACT III.

SCENE I.—*Apartment in the Palace.*

MELCHA seated. MORA is passing across the stage, but is arrested by the Princess's voice.

MEL. Come hither, sister, tell me what has chanced,
That Melcha should be shunned? She, who for long
Was made the mark and centre of a love—
All undeserved indeed, but dearly prized—
Tell me, dear Mora, has a moment robbed
This treasure from me?

MORA. Ah! what words are these?
The loss of love, at least, can never be
Thy subject of complaint.

MEL. Why am I shunned?—
Why are the footsteps, which once linger'd near,
Turned far away?—Why dost thou hasten on,
Without a friendly word to cheer me? I was wont
To raise young Randal's jealousy betimes,
Because I could detain thee from his side.
Thy brother shuns my presence; and my sire—
But that I speak not of——

MORA.

Alas ! alas !

Thou, that know'st all things—thou canst well divine
The cause of this estrangement.

MEL.

Pardon me,

It is beyond my reach—I cannot grasp,
A thing so marvellous. To me, it seems
That the brief space, which now remains between
Me, and my doom, might be beguiled by those
Who never failed me—till my hour of need.
Dost thou not think a friendly voice might raise
My courage, if it fell, or cheer my heart,
Or fortify my mind, or, at the least,
Dispel the thoughts awhile, that are too prone
To dwell on one dark subject ?

MORA.

But this time—

It is an awful time—we are afraid
To rob thy father, of his rightful claim,
Upon thy numbered moments.

MEL.

Thou art wrong ;

My father shuns me too—at least in speech—
Although his eyes still follow ; and his gaze
Fills my whole heart with anguish. He will sit
Long hours in moody silence, till I fear
That grief will vanquish reason, and I rise
And leave his presence ; but he shortly comes—
Asking why I have left him—with a smile
That freezes up my blood. “ Ere long,” he says,

“ I shall be childless, let me look on thee,
While thou art here.” And that is all he says—
At least to me. It ’s very hard to bear,
And so I steal away ; and oftentimes wish
For thee and Feargus, to dispel the train
Of sad reflections.

MORA. Princess—sister—friend !
Oh ! pardon us our faults, for we have erred.
But, for my own weak self, I scarce can bear
To look upon thee, or to think of that
Which hangs suspended o’er thy precious head.
I know not how I feel—I cannot sift
Or analyse my thoughts ; but in my sight
Thou art a martyr now—a holy saint,
By base men sacrificed. I dare not look
Upon thee as I did—I dare not speak
Of common things to thee. The calm, still, grief
That ’s written on thy brow—the fixt resolve
That dwells upon thy lip—inspire my mind
With mingled dread, and awe, as if thou wert
No longer of this earth—a thing apart
From us, and our vain cares.

MEL. Not yet, not yet !
Mora, my heart still lingers with you all ;
And will, while life is lent me. All the change
That I experience, is a settled calm,
Which has not much in common with content,
But seems the mere result of fixed resolve—

The choice that wavers not—the remedy
That has been chosen. Mora, I do entreat
Let not the friendship, which I long have borne
To thee, and to thy brother, be obscured
When most I need its influence. Respect
And admiration, are poor substitutes
For sympathy, and love, and confidence.

MORA. But thou art one, to sway, and to engage,
By turns, each feeling of the human heart.
And thou hast drawn a circle round the land—
A spell of gentle magic—compassing
Thy father's broad dominions. Thou hast raised
Thyself into an idol! Woe to us,
Who crowd, like pilgrims, round the favoured shrine
To see the holy image in the hands
Of sacrilegious foes. What wouldst thou do?—
What, in thy fatal haste, has been resolved?
Canst thou believe that we shall bless thy name
For yielding up the one we cherish most,
Into the tyrant's power? Thou hast no right
To make thyself beloved!—to coil and twine
The love of others round thee, till thou art
A portion of their being, then to strike
The blow, which falls on many—not alone
On thee—thou self devoted!

MEL.

Mora, pause!

Thy eloquence and reason are ill matched.
Confess, thy judgment wars against thy speech.

MORA. I will not pause!—didst thou not bid me speak?
Didst thou not chide my silence? I have gained
New courage to address thee. Have a care:
The sword that's raised against thy breast, may slay
More victims than thyself! 'Tis thine to pause;
Lest the meek gentle graces, which become
A Christian's practice, fleet and fade away
Before this stern cold courage—this display
Of Spartan virtue!

MEL. Thou art somewhat harsh
In this thy judgment; yet forgive the smile
Thy eagerness provokes—it is the first
That has relaxed these lips for many an hour.
Come, sit beside me—take my hand in thine,
And I will strive to calm that ruffled brow.
Thou, thou, at least, wilt ne'er belie the land
That gave thee birth. The pure Milesian blood
That mantles in thy cheek—the warm brown locks
Reflected in the mirror of thine eye—
The graceful freedom of thy movements!—these
May be the dower which partial Erin gives
To her more favoured daughters: but they're not
The test that proves thy nation—the sure sign
That stamps thee——

MORA. (*interrupting her.*) Melcha, Melcha, thou
 dost speak
Of trivial things, when heavy cares oppress
Thy heart, and mine.

MEL. So do we all, by turns,
And thou less rarely than thy friend. Confess,
Is not the jest as sparkling on thy lips—
The smile as beaming—and the eye as bright :
Though grief, and fear, and doubt, and what beside
Can vex our feeble natures, lurk within ?
Those of the other sex, who from despite,
Or through revenge revile us, oftentimes say
We are enigmas—there's some truth, methinks,
In what they mean for slander, when they treat
Of such a true-born daughter of our isle,
As lovely Mora, with her wayward mood,
Her eager spirit, and her loving heart
Less able to endure, than act—unfit
For passive suffering, with a bound she clears
The gulf, by many deemed impassable,
Which severs mirth from sadness—oh, thou art
A mass of contradiction—yet so well
Blended, and tempered, that we could not wish
Thee other, than thou art !

MORA. Princess, 'tis mine
To hear these words in silence, yet I scarce
Can guess to what they tend ; the glaring faults
Which strike the common eye, can be no theme
For thee to speak—for me, alas ! to hear
From lips, whose accents will so soon be hushed.

MEL. Thou dost not know, perchance, what has
been said,

Nor carest to recal, that first thy friend
By thee was canonized—a holy saint,
A blessed martyr, she appeared to thee—
A few short moments more, and she was hurled
From that high pinnacle within thy mind—
And Melcha, with a heart as warm as thine,
As womanly and tender, straight became
A stern, cold, Pagan goddess! I must smile
To think on these extremes.

MORA.

And well thou may'st!

I know not what I say; I scarcely know
What 'tis I feel or suffer, save indeed
It's more than I can bear. Oh! it were vain
To dream my idle words could work a change
Upon thy purpose—'tis my heart that speaks:
As for my mind, it cannot comprehend,
Or dwell on thy decision.

MEL.

That is fixed,

Beyond persuasion's power; yet these dear proofs
Of true affection, cheer, and soothe, and nerve
Thy sister's mind. Come, Mora, wilt describe
Some path for me to follow—wilt devise
Some cunning plan? I will not pledge myself
Indeed to do thy bidding, yet I fain
Would learn thy views upon my destiny;
For, subtle as thou art, it would be hard
To point a refuge out.

MORA.

'Twere quickly done.

Would that the gratitude which swells my breast,
Might lend persuasive eloquence to words
That will but fall unheeded on thy ear.
There is yet time to violate a vow,
Less honoured in the keeping—it was forced
By terror and compassion from thy lips.
Go, and rejoice thy father with the news
Of this thy late repentance ; bless his ear
With the assurance thou art still his child.
He is a man, a soldier, and a king
Advanced in years ; it is for him to judge
What shall be done in this extremity.
Give up thy cares to him, and to the men
Who'd rather wield the sword, than raise the voice
In womanly lamenting.

MEL. (*sadly*.)

Blood enough,

Has flowed in vain ; it is the fruitless loss
Of human life that fills my soul with dread—
The thought of noble beings, one by one,
Cut down like grass before the mower's scythe,
Without the hope that stays the patriot's soul
Upon its flight to heav'n—the sweet proud hope
That his dear country is avenged, or saved !

MORA (*impatiently*). Thou wilt not hear ; it seems

I must not speak,

Although 'twas at thy bidding, I began.

MEL. (*smiling.*) Say on, dear sister, and I'll strive
to be
As patient as thyself.

MORA. Of thee I speak.
If thou art beautiful—if on thy form
And on thy features, Nature chose to spend
All her best gifts of beauty, and of grace,
So that men's eyes are bent on thee with love,
And women feel that rivalry were vain—
Is thine the fault? thou, who hast ever scorned
Attraction's petty snares, whose nobler mind
Disdains the poor small arts, practised by those
Who lay a claim to modesty withal—
Is thine the fault if Thorgill be not blind
As well as base?

MEL. Nay, Mora, I must break
My plighted word—but this is not the theme
Which I allotted thee.

MORA. That—is to come.
There are two sufferers here to be relieved,
Thy country and thyself: and for the first,
Be it thy father's care to find a balm
For Erin's wounds. Oh, Melcha! be content,
And leave those sterner duties to the men,
Whose lot it is to grapple with them. Turn,
Melcha—I plead for thee unto thyself—

Turn from such thoughts, cast all thy burthens down,
And fly for solace——

MEL. (*eagerly.*) 'Tis a grateful word !
Where on this earth for solace shall I seek,
Save in the knowledge that I run the course
Of my apportioned duty ?

MORA. In the thought
That thou canst still the heart's impassioned cry
For happiness . . . that thou canst give, yet gain !
That in the giving, thou hast gained thyself
An arm that will uphold thee, be the path
As rugged as it may—a manly breast
Whereon thy weeping may be stilled—fond eyes
To mirror back thy feelings—lips to check
The sigh when it arises. Wilt thou learn,
By sweet experience, where the secret lies
That turns our grief to joy—that lends a charm
To dire misfortune, and invests the world—
The cold dark world we live in—with a light
Borrow'd from heav'n ?

MEL. (*hurriedly.*) Nay, Mora, thou dost touch
On things which do become the moment ill
Wherein they are disclosed.—I pray no more—
I cannot chide thee, for thy heart is full,
And has o'erflowed in words. 'Tis well for thee
Thy lot is of thy choice—a rare event
In this our weary pilgrimage below.

But once again I do entreat, be still,
Our fates have nought in common.

MORA.

We are both

Beloved by noble spirits ; we have gained
The secret of that alchemy which turns
To sparkling gold the common dross of life !

MEL. Thou hast forgot, such words are worse
than vain ;

I am the daughter of a king—there's none
To love me for myself !

MORA.

In that reply

The noblest, warmest, truest heart is wronged,
That ever beat within a hero's breast.

MEL. What is thy aim, thy meaning ; to what end
Are these strange words addressed, that are not like
To soothe my ruffled spirits ?

MOR.

Thou must know !

In such a case a woman needs no aid,
Her eye is keen enough ; and, were it dull,
There is an inward consciousness that speaks
Louder, than human voices.

MEL.

Not with me.

Thou hast forgot—no matter, 'twere not well
I should remind thee. Mora, speak at once,
Who is the man that has been rash enough
To love a thing so doomed ? What name shall be

Remembered in my prayers, with some remorse,
For adding yet another pang to those
That are our common portion ?

MORA.

One I love

Better than aught this world contains, save him
That I have chosen from the world beside ;
One who loves thee, beyond the power of words !
Beyond all things save honour, and the land—
The peerless, hapless land—that gave him birth !

MEL. Alas ! alas ! this is a heavy loss—

A brother, friend, and counsellor at once.

I never dreamed of this ! I never feared

That sorrow from that quarter would approach ;

It wounds me deeply. See thou tell'st him not

That which has passed between us. Fare thee well !

I shall be calmer when we meet again—

But this is very grievous. Pray be gone.

If tears must fall, they should be shed alone,

For there are springs enough in every breast.

[*Exit MELCHA. MORA stands transfixed for some time, and then goes out in the opposite direction.*]

SCENE II.—*Before the King's Chamber.*

Enter FEARGUS, RANDAL, DONAGH, and many others.

RAN. How canst thou hope to move him? This
last grief
Has quenched the flickering fire of energy,
And dotage has commenced.

DON. Alas! too true!
You'd deem the few short hours that have elapsed
Since Thorgill left the palace, had sufficed
To do the work of years. He'll sit and gaze
Upon vacuity, and never speak
Save to himself in broken sentences,
Or to his daughter in a churlish tone,
And yet he will not spare her from his sight.
It's piteous to behold.

FEAR. You are at fault.
This sudden blow fell down upon the heart,
And stunned the spirit; be content awhile,
And give the aged father time... ere long,
The monarch, and the soldier will resume
Their wonted empire.

RAN. I see not that.
The abdication has been volunt'ry,
And from the dust where he has cast himself,
Cuthullin has no strength to rise again.

FEAR. In Randal's sight, all monarchs should be made

Of other stuff than we, their fellow men.
Does not the pinnacle on which they stand
Expose each failing, to the eye of those
Who are not slow to cavil ; while below
Upon the crowded plain, their subjects pass,
Escaping observation ? Kings are men,
And therefore fallible.

RAN. So far I grant.

But for my part, I do esteem the man
Whom high responsibility exalts
In virtue, as in station. There are some
Who're carried here and there, by every breath,
From the straight course, so long as their path lies
In bye-way solitudes, sequestered spots,
Where they (with erring judgment I confess,)
Argue, it matters not, save to themselves,
Which way their steps be turned. Once let the road
Lead them on higher ground, once let them think
They are observed of many——

FEAR. (*interrupting him.*) And they prove,
That the poor praise of man, the feeble tones
Of human approbation, rank above
The tribute of their conscience.

RAN. Feargus, you must love
Cuthullin well indeed, when you excuse
His conduct to yourself, and all brave men.

FEAR. You shall not blame me, Randal, when he comes :

I'll then speak openly, with due respect,
And deference, and affection, as becomes
A subject, and a son. Heard you, last night
The Princess had an audience of her sire ?
What she imparted, what was then resolved,
Whence both derived solace, and courage, too,
Has not transpired ; but Melcha left the king
(So Mora tells,) radiant with beaming looks,
No smile upon her lip, but something there
Brighter, and calmer, and her very voice
Bespoke tranquillity.

RAN. What of the king,
After this *kingly* council?

FEAR. He came forth
Another man—his head erect—his step
As proud and firm, as when, in better days,
Cuthullin strode across the field of strife ;
And, with a voice that sounded like the cry
With which he led the charge on Tara's plains,
He issued his commands !

DON. Cuthullin comes?

[*The doors are thrown open, and the King enters; he is in complete armour, but bareheaded.*]

CUTH. All peace be with you all. The messenger,
Who, in the name of those here present, craved

An audience, and a hearing, found your king
Busied in sending summons far and wide,
Including all the noble names you bear
With honour to yourselves, and him.

FEAR.

We hail

This most auspicious omen. May it prove,
An earnest of the future unity
Between Cuthullin and his people !

CUTH.

Ay ?

It was my hope, my wish, and my belief,
That we were knit together by a bond
That e'en adversity could never loose.
I was deceived, it seems, for Feargus' words,
And the dark brows of some among you, speak
Of hidden discontent. I summoned ye
To gain your counsel, and impart mine own ;
But age should yield in eagerness to youth,
And so, show forth your mission : let me learn
The nature of your wishes, or complaints.
Feargus, fall back awhile, I would not hear
Such greeting from thy lips. Randal, advance,
And show the errand forth. There was a time
My subjects deemed I had a willing ear
For all their grievances ; they do me wrong,
Who say that time is past.

RAN.

Cuthullin, king !

I crave for pardon, ere I give thee cause.

I know my nature well : I am too sure
The barrier of my lips will not suffice
To check the eager spirit, which is wrought
Almost to fury. I can not controul
Or qualify my words, on such a theme
As that which now compels me to demand
Redress, and reparation for our wrongs.

CUTH. Your wrongs, my son ? what wrongs have
you to bear
But those we share in common—wrongs imposed
By the hard hand of Denmark ? None can say
His wrongs, or his afflictions, do exceed
The burthen of his king.

RAN. Yet thine the fault !
Thou art the man that might have stepped between
Thy people, and their fate, who might have stood,
Like him of old, to stay the plague that spread
Over the land—this fair and fertile land—
The land we love so well—the island home
In whose defence we asked thee leave to die !
Cuthullin, call that fatal day to mind,
When the full pulse of liberty swelled high
In every stripling's breast—when the young heart
Expanded in its iron vest, until
The boy that left his home, perchance with tears,
Grew to a hero ! and the man-at-arms,
The common soldier in the ranks, became

A patriot ! when the coward might have gained
Courage, and vigour from the startling thought,
That on the issue of the battle hung
All that gives charm to life. We were but few,
But the whole band were heroes . . . 'tis no boast
To say as much ; we fought like desperate men,
And every Irish soldier hewed himself
A pedestal of foes whereon to stand—
An avenue of corpses as a road
To Thorgill's life. Then came the fatal word —
The hateful order, which condemned us all
To shame eternal, and bowed down the neck
Below our tyrants' feet—which made us slaves—
We, and our children yet unborn. For me,
I do confess, I do proclaim that I—
Ay, and young Feargus, thy adopted son—
We did dishonour thy commands ; we strove
To urge our soldiers forward, but the men
Whom danger never tamed, were panic-struck ;
Through shame and disappointment, they cast down
Their weapons on the ground—they cried aloud
Upon their monarch's name, and said 'twas he,
Not Thorgill, who had vanquished them.

CUTH.

No more !

Randal, you do presume upon my state,
My fallen fortunes, to address me thus.
I am your king—it is not meet that I
Should pause to hear such words.

Thou hast implied, and Randal has affirmed,
The spring of all this evil lies with me.
Ye do me wrong, my sons !

FEAR.

Ah ! no ; my liege ;

I will not bid thee look upon the past—
The gloomy past—but rather turn thine eyes
Upon the future, which is all our own.
It is a fertile field ; oh, bid us reap
A glorious harvest ! Let me plead with thee
For us, thy country, and thyself. Arise !
And grapple with thy destiny. Arise !
Gird on thy sword ; burst the ignoble bonds
That long have bound us. Raise the banner cry
That once bore terror to advancing hosts ;
Rally thy people round thee, they who chafe,
And fret, and fume, beneath the tyrants' yoke.
Give us one day to prove our loyalty—
To try the metal of our swords. Lead on,
And let us meet our tyrants face to face !
Fond eyes will be upon us, gentle prayers
Will find their way to Heaven, and we shall stand
Beneath the holy shadow of our homes ;
Our feet upon the soil, that we dispute,
Spurred onward by the smarting sense of wrongs,
Fired by the hero's, and the patriot's hope.
Who shall withstand our might ? We will not pause,
Nor draw a rein, nor slacken in the work,
Till we can turn, and hail thee King, once more,

King of thy native land, and of the men
Whose homage may be prized, because they're free ;
Because they've cleansed the stain on thy renown,
And traced their names in characters of blood,
Upon the roll of fame !

[FEARGUS kneels amid the acclamation of his comrades, the King raises and embraces him, placing his hand on the youth's shoulder, he addresses the others.

CUTH. You've chosen well and wisely. This is he,
Who should be advocate in honour's cause,
For courage with humility combined,
And strength of spirit with a gentle heart,
Convince, while they persuade. Look up, my son,
And be content ; the prophecy's fulfilled,
And there is unity in our desires.
For that, ye came to ask's already given.
This day, the royal mandate has gone forth,
To levy troops—to place them under arms—
To cause the sovereign's pleasure to be known,
That every man and youth, whose years, and strength,
Fit him for active service, shall attend
Upon the day appointed. The appeal
Is one that will be heard, and answered. Yet,
The strait to which we are reduced, demands
That all our measures should be secret. We
Must bear a peaceful aspect, show no signs
Of this, our smouldering vengeance, till it burst,
Like heaven's own bolt, on the devoted heads.

And now, farewell. We'll meet again ere long,
For I have separate orders for ye all,
And posts to grant, and duties to enforce,
Which will, I trust, content ye.

RAN. Good my liege,
We leave thy presence lightened of a load
Of care, and shame, and sorrow ; with a hope
That in itself is joy ! I do entreat
Thy gracious pardon for my hasty speech.

CUTH. Let but thy deeds obliterate thy words,
And we will ne'er recal them. Once, again,
All peace be with you. I have pledged my word
To meet the Princess now—but half a moon,
And she will quit us all. What times are these,
When neither rank, nor age, nor sex, exempts
From peril, and misfortune—Fare ye well.

SCENE III.

MELCHA *alone in her Garden.*

MEL. How fair and peaceful! I will linger here,
And strive to imbibe the calm, that makes its home
In this sequestered spot. Here, where the hours
Of every childish holiday were passed,
And where, despite the destiny of her

Who rambles still amid its solitudes,
Each passing year contributes some new gift.
The bowers grow more luxuriant, and the flowers
Increase in beauty, while the singing birds
Rejoice to bring their little helpmates home
To such a leafy shelter. Who would deem,
In gazing forth on such tranquillity,
That crime and bloodshed on the threshold stand,
And all the world's worst passions storm without?
It is a spot where we might almost still
Our griefs, and memories . . . are they not the same,
In melancholy meaning?—for a time—
Where we might rest, and breathe a little space,
Having outstripped our thoughts. Alas! they rush
Full-mouthed upon us, when they find us out:
We pay escape too dearly. This retreat
Is like the presence of a well-tryed friend,
Grateful in every mood; if transient hope
Bear up my spirit, here I love to dream
Of brighter days to come: if sorrow press
With double force, 'tis here I strive to gain
New vigour to endure, where the fresh breeze
Is wafted from the mountains. . When my mind
Is torn, and harassed, far beyond the power
Of human sympathy to bring relief:
Yet here the smiling images of peace,
The soothing sound of water, and the notes
That swell upon the air, with the sweet breath

Of mingled perfume—these will steal their way
Down to the heart, and lull it with a sense
Of healing balm. Ah me! since last I stood
Beneath the shadow of this spreading tree,
I've added to my store, my dower of grief.

[She pauses.]

I know not why, it should not be, and yet,
The thought of meeting Feargus fills my soul
With something too like dread. What, if I fail?
What if my courage should forsake me now?
Ere I have entered on my long campaign
Of peril and distress! I'll school myself,
Although I fain would speak some kindly words:
That's not the course, if I would wean his heart
From a misplaced affection. 'Twill be hard
A cold and distant bearing to maintain,
With one I long have cherished as a friend.
Perhaps he may not come—that would be well;
And yet I'd rather meet him once again,
Although 'twill put my firmness to the test,
To see him suffering, and to know myself
The wretched cause. He may have loved me long,
For aught that I can tell; and then, if so,
His bearing will be that of every day.

[She listens.]

Those footsteps are too rapid for the King,
Too firm for Mora's fairy tread. 'Tis he!

[Enter FEARGUS.]

FEAR. But in part :
She was forbidden, so she said, to speak
Of that which passed between you ; but so far
Mora in me confided, and with tears
Told how she vainly strove to turn your mind,
From this projected sacrifice. 'Twas she

Who bade me seek you here, and, Princess, add
My prayer to hers—'Twere idle to suppose
That words of mine could sway in your resolve.

MEL. Feargus, I pray no more. It is enough.
My father's honoured wishes had prevailed,
If human power could shake me. It is done—
I have resolved. In such a time as this,
It is incumbent on us all to act,
And so perchance the hardest task of all
Falls to my portion. If it were for this
You sought to speak with me, 'twere better we
Discoursed no more : it is a gloomy theme,
And one on which I do not care to dwell.

FEAR. Ah, speak not thus in cold and distant tones,
That sound all unfamiliar from those lips.
I have no right to counsel, or to ask—
No claim upon thy hearing—yet I came
Emboldened by the thought of by-gone years,
And childish friendship, to thy dear retreat.
Ah, Melcha ! look around—there are the flowers
Which we together planted—there's the bridge
Which I so proudly kept, and guarded long,
Though Mora led thee on to the attack,
And ye were both so valiant—that's the rock
Up which I climbed, to pluck a crown for thee,
And flung it on thy head, whilst thou below
Wert weeping at my prowess—that's the brook

MEL. (*with displeasure.*) My wishes have no power
To bind your lips ; they are forgot as soon
As I have uttered them.

FEAR. Yet, pardon me,
I have so much—yet nothing, to impart,
I would prolong this interview, although
To you it may be irksome, and for me
'Tis somewhat painful. It may be the last—
The very last—Oh, Heaven ! in such a thought
Lurks the whole wasting misery of years.
The last ! the last ! 'tis hard to bid farewell,
For the last time to a familiar scene :
To mount a steed—or to caress a hound—
For the last time. But when the one we leave
Has been our Playmate—Sister—Friend !

MEL.

No more !

Feargus, it is a cruel act to strike
 At the small stock of courage, I have gained
 Through many a struggle. I should learn of thee
 To bear myself with calmness, be the mind
 Disturbed. . .

FEAR. (*hurriedly.*) Ay, it were well to gain
Lessons of reason, from the raving lips,
Of frenzy. In meek tones address despair . .
Or cheat the fevered tongue with draughts of oil ;
But speak not thou of calmness, to the man,
Within whose breast thou hast implanted seeds
Of madness ! and despair . .

MEI. Ah, Feargus, cease—
This is too terrible. I've not deserved

To be upbraided thus. Let me depart;
We'll meet again, and take a last farewell—
A kind and gentle parting—which will live
Better in both our memories, than a scene
So full of passion.

FEAR. Wilt thou not remain?
I'll be as gentle as thyself. I'll crouch,
And lie down at thy feet, like the tamed beast
That pious Una led . . . I'll tune my voice
To softer tones . . . I'll guard my very looks,
Lest they should trouble thee. But, go not yet . . .
Ah! go not yet. It is an awful thing,
To see the one we love go forth, and ask
That question of the heart, which makes it sink,
With doubt, and dread!

MEL. My Brother! I entreat——

FEAR. (*with vehemence.*) Not by that hateful name,
which once I prized,
Above thy father's title!—not by that
Shalt thou adjure me! Call me by my name.
I have a name, when uttered by thy lips,
It strikes upon my ear with a new sound—
A sweet mysterious music.

MEL. Feargus—then,
For Mora's sake, and mine, I do entreat
That thou wilt hence depart.

FEAR.

Why Mora's sake,
Why any name, but thine? Thou art the star
That rules my destiny, and from above
Shines on in brightness, though to me, its light
Be dimmed by my own tears. Thou art the saint,
Through whom my prayers might be convey'd to
Heav'n—

MEL. (*with dignity.*) Can I believe these words, or
can I trust

Such vain professions? when my earnest wish,
The oft-repeated boon that I have claimed,
Is waved aside; when common courtesy
Is outraged in my presence, and my voice
Is rudely silenced! Sir, I do command
That you will hence depart. I'll be obeyed—
I am your Monarch's daughter.

[*She pauses and then adds abruptly:*

Feargus! friend—

I grieve to speak these words: the fault is yours—
But there are duties which I owe myself.

FEAR. Say it once more, and I am gone. Once
more,

And it shall be for ever! In that tone
And with that air of majesty, point out
The gulf that yawns between us. Say thou art
The daughter of a king, and then imply
That I am one, who from my low estate,
Should never dare to raise his eyes to thee.

MEL. Feargus, forgive ! I knew not how to stem
The torrent of thy passion. 'Twas not thus
In brighter days, for then I strove to quell
All mem'ry of distinction. These sad times,
Which shake the basis of my father's throne,
Produce unworthy thoughts, or at the least
Words which belie my nature.

FEAR. Wilt thou hear ?
Wilt listen while I speak, for the last time ?
For this is our farewell. Wilt thou deny
A hearing to the man, whom thou wert wont
To call thy friend, and brother ? Are the ties,
The long long ties of childish friendship, snapped . .
Because, with rash rude hands, I drew them close
And closer round my heart ? Is this a crime
That woman cannot pardon ? Thou that art
Gentle and pitiful in aught beside—
Thou who hast never marked, with eye austere,
Another's failings—Is my love for thee
To be declared a crime—a love as pure
And holy as its object. Melcha, hear
What yet remains to tell . . . Nor turn thy head,
Nor wave thy hand, nor look as if I were
A thing to dread and shun. I was thy friend,
I am the brother of thy friend.

MEL. Say on ;
But Feargus, if my earnest prayers prevail,

Or weigh with thee, thou wilt command thyself,
For *Melcha's* sake and thine.

FEAR. (*very sadly.*)

Oh, fear me not !

I'll be as calm as mountain torrents are,
When chilled by winter's hand . . . as yonder lake,
(Thro' which the river rushes madly now)
Beneath its icy case. I'll look serene,
As quenched volcanoes do, so that I gain
Thy hearing for a time—'tis all I wish,
Or ask, or hope—Melcha, hast thou not heard
That those who dwell, as we have done, beneath
A common roof, whose intercourse has been
As free and unrestrained as if indeed
Fraternal bonds united them, live on
Throughout their lives, without a thought beyond
That peaceful friendship? So, perchance, it fares
With many, or with most ; but when the love
Of calm and gradual growth, blooms and expands,
And ripens into passion : then, oh, then !
What is the sudden fancy of an hour,
The hasty kindling of the flame, compared
With all the long sweet retrospect of years—
The thousand guileless memories, which wind,
And twine themselves around the heart—the forms
Which love incipient took, unrecognized
And unsuspected, till the truth at length
Burst forth ! As on my mind two years ago,

Yes ! two long years in secret have I loved.
Urged on by Mora's counsels, and impelled
By the loud cry within my breast, to speak—
To pour my sorrows forth—confess my crime,
And tell thee of a love devoid of hope,
And therefore not a crime . . . Yet, day by day,
Thy gentle majesty, thy friendliness
And absence of reserve,—all, all, imposed
The task of silence. Ay, perchance the fear
Of hazarding thy friendship, the sole boon
I could expect—this, and another cause,
Which hath a wider range. My lips were sealed.

MEL. Why, Feargus, why, were they unclosed at last,
To grieve me so profoundly ? A few days,
A few more hours of self-command, and thou
Hadst not exposed thyself, or me, to this.
It cannot yield thee comfort, and, in truth,
It makes my trial harder to endure.

FEAR. Melcha, thy words are coldly kind, they
 prove,
Thy ignorance of that which fills my breast.
No comfort, said'st thou ? Ay, but there is joy,
And that is more than comfort ! Watch the bird
Whose prison gates are opened, see him wing
His rapid flight towards heav'n ; look, how he soars
Upon the pinions that were cramped so long !
A moment more, and doubtless he will pay
His freedom dearly. Cruelty and death

Await him on all sides ; yet he has gained
One hour of liberty ! Bethink thyself,
Of that which tempted me : I could have borne
To see thee day by day, to know the pray'rs
Of holy sisters had prevailed—at length,
To hail thee spouse of heav'n ; and once I deemed
I could have stood amid thy bridal train,
Beside the sacred altar, while thy lot
Was linked to that, of one as worthy thee,
As mortal could aspire. I did believe
Courage and virtue would have lent themselves
For that short struggle ; but it is thy fate
That has unmanned me quite, to know thee doomed
To misery and shame. Ay, I must speak !
I cannot curb my thoughts : they must have vent
Or they will lie too heavy on my brain,
And that were worse for thee, and me, indeed,
For then they would be frenzied, and no power
Would keep them down ; and then my words would
 sound
Savage, and strange to thee.

MEL.

Talk not of shame !

Will it be shame if I fulfil the task
My father in his love has left undone ?
Will it be shame, if, like the Grecian girl,
I mount the altar with unfaltering steps,
A willing sacrifice !

FEAR.

Ay, unto death !

But thou wilt live . . . Speak, Melcha, speak at once—
What is thy purpose ? Daring as thou art,
To meet the worst that fate could offer thee,
There's that thou couldst not brook—oh, speak at once !
I have a hope, that's kindled at the light,
The pure chaste flame that's beaming in thine eye.
Tell me thy purpose . . . 'tis a boon I crave,
The only recompense thou canst bestow
On one, who gave thee all he had on earth.
Is thy choice fixed on death ? The grave is calm,
And in thy sight must seem the gate of heav'n.
But Thorgill's threat of fury on the land
Will not be thus appeased ; a pale cold corpse
Is not the bride he woos !

MEL.

I've heard thee long

And very patiently, and ere we part,
I too have that to say which must be said.
Yet we will meet again ; for on the eve
Of my departure, 'tis my earnest wish,
That my immediate friends should meet me here.
The prayers and rigid fasting I observe
Will give me strength, so I devoutly hope
To bear myself with calmness—then my words
Will be address'd to all, and they'll be few—
And therefore . . . now . . . before we part this day,
I'll speak of that, which weighs upon my mind,
And ask my friend's forgiveness. Well, I know,
That I have injured thee.

FEAR. No voice but thine,
Should utter words so false and strange as these,
Within my hearing.

MEL. (*interrupts him.*) I have injured thee,
Unwillingly indeed; it was my lot
To cross the path where thou wert bounding on,
With heart as buoyant as thy step. Awhile
Our journey lay together, side by side,
And thought with thought united: the same cloud
Or sunbeam was above us, the same flowers
Blossomed beneath our feet, and the same breath
Of summer air was playing round our heads,
As we passed on together. Thy warm heart,
Thy generous manly bearing, and the truth
Which spake in every tone and glance, endeared
That time to memory; now our steps approach
The cross way where the paths divide, and I
Raise my dim eyes to bid thee part in peace.
Thou that hast called me cold, couldst thou conceive
The pang, the agony, with which I look
Upon my work, with which I read, that I—
Who owe thee gratitude, and give esteem,
And feel a tender interest in thy fate,
Which will endure till death—Oh, God! that I
Should bring a cloud upon thee; should obscure
The face of nature to thine eyes, and bow
That youthful head with sorrow . . . This is called
The triumph of our sex! See, Feargus, see!

I look to thee for pardon, through my tears.
What can the woman be, who deems this joy,
Who finds a cause for pride, when she herself
Has been the baneful cause of woe to him . . .
The man, whose only fault is loving her
Too dearly, for his peace ?

FEAR. (*with tenderness.*) It was thy thought ;
But now to check, and chill me, with that air
Of sternness, and with tones severe and cold,
Showing but little knowledge of the heart
With which thou hast to deal. These few last words,
Uttered in thy own voice, and spirit, these
Have calmed me, or subdued—no matter which :
'Tis thine to mould and bend me, to thy will.
Melcha, believe, kindness and gentleness
Should mark the sway of woman over those
Who love her (with a true and worthy love,)
Whatever be her bent. Thou hast regained
Thy wonted empire, having cast aside
The bearing, but assumed. I will depart,
Or will remain ; I will be mute, or speak . . .
According to thy pleasure, and my gaze
Shall not recal the blush upon thy cheek,
Although it might enhance the memory
Of thy last look . . . as these few kindly words
Will sanctify this hour, until the time—
The happy hoped-for time—when life, and grief
Will have an end for me !

MEL. Ah ! speak not so,
Remember what remains for thee to do ;
And wish not thou for death ;—the coward's hope—
Because *this* hope, that is the least of all,
Has been denied thee. Live, for Mora's sake !
Would she not mourn thee, with a breaking heart ?

FEAR. Ah, no! ah, no! her tears would soon be
dried
Upon her lover's bosom.

MEL. But the King...
Who calls thee son:

FEAR. It is an empty name,
And when thou'rt lost, his grief will be too great,
To mourn for aught beside.

MEL. There's something still
To bid thee cling to life. Feergus, I know
That thou hast loved another. When it's past,
And I am gone from hence, thou wilt return
To that, thy first allegiance.

FEAR. Art thou mad,
Or only cruel, to deride me thus?

MEL. Dear Mora, when she told (for I confess
Thy sister spake of this,) with sighs and tears,
She told me of thy love, and then she said
There lurked a stronger passion in thy breast.

FEAR. Or she is mad, or thou art mad, or both—
How can I trust thy words, or hers? Perchance

My brain is turned, I do not hear aright. . .

(*With a bitter smile*) Where is thy rival? Say . . what is
the love

That shares my bosom, with one thought of thee?

MEL. Thy country, Feargus ! thy dear native land,
That, like a widowed mother, sits and weeps,
And calls upon the remnant of her race
For justice, and for vengeance, on the men
Who, with their steel-clad feet, have trodden down
And trampled on our heritage—laid waste
Our fertile valleys, and imbued the ground—
Fair Erin's boasted verdure—with the blood
Of her own children. Feargus, call to mind
Thy filial duty—for thou wert a son
Before thou wert a lover. Go, fulfil
The high and noble part allotted thee—
'Tis mine to suffer, but 'tis thine to dare !
Go, and forget the sorrow I have caused ;
Go, and remove my image from its shrine,
And place thy country's there ; and be thou blest
In every struggle, every enterprise !
And let the distant fame of thy great deeds
Cause my fond heart to swell with pride. . . Oh ! then
I'll cry indeed with triumph, This is he
Who fixed his love on Melcha ! Fare ye well . . .
Dear Feargus, fare ye well . . . and think upon
My last injunctions. No, no ! not the last—

I said we'd meet again. Did I not say
The eve of my departure . . .

FEAR. (*seizes her hand.*) Melcha, speak !
There's that which tells me—oh ! for such a hope—
For such a present—I would stake my all,
Of future, and of past. Beloved, speak !

MEL. I must be gone—it is beyond my strength. .
Feargus, farewell ! this shall not be the last.

[*She moves forward with faltering steps. Enter MORA hastily,
who throws her arms around, and supports her, in her exit.*

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—*Banquet Hall in Thorgill's Palace.*

The King, in a peaceful garb, is presiding at the feast ; he is crowned with flowers, as are many of his courtiers. In the foreground, an aged Bard is singing to his harp. The moonlight streams in, through the open casements.

All hail to the victor, the warrior, the king !
The nations around with his glory shall ring ;
And bards yet unborn of his prowess shall sing.
All hail to the monarch—the high-crested Dane !
The print of his footstep is fresh on the main—
Yet his standard is flutt'ring o'er mountain and plain.
And beauty, and valour, and wisdom bow down ;
And each hour, as it flies, adds a gem to his crown !

All hail to the victor ! In whom we can find
The power of the thunder—the speed of the wind—
And the courage of Herrman, and Odin combined ?
Whom Eagir * the mighty, hath sped on his way—
Whom the merciless Nornas † so meekly obey ;
And the Valkyrs ‡ have singled in vain for their prey—
To whom valour, and wisdom, and beauty bow down ;
And each hour as it flies, adds a gem to his crown !

All hail to the victor ! whose conquests extend
Over monarch, and slave—over foeman, and friend ;
And who knows the proud spirit of woman to bend

* The sea god.

† The fates.

‡ The choosers of the slain.

Love, mingled with terror, awakes at his sight :
For his brow, like the sun-god's, is beaming with light ;
But his frown is as dark as the ocean at night !
And valour, and beauty, and wisdom bow down ;
And each hour as it flies, adds a gem to his crown !

THOR. No more ! no more ! I fear that swelling
voice

May rouse the slumb'ring echoes round the lake,
And yield a churlish welcome to our guests.
Good Sweno, thou hast scarcely chosen well
On such a night ; a sweeter, softer lay,
Would better suit the aspect of the scene,
The peaceful garb we wear, and th' event
Which calls us here together. Woman's ear
Is tuned to flattery, and another's praise
May jar discordant on her finer sense,
If this, thy loyal tribute, should o'ertake
Our brides upon their way. Sweno, forgive
This rude requital of thy minstrelsy ;
Thy largesse shall be one of Melcha's smiles,
And thou wilt be repaid : a little while,
Such strains may be resumed, but for to-night
Let thy harp vibrate to a softer theme ;
Thy voice in plaintive swelling accents rise,
For thou shalt be our advocate in love,
We'll woo them by thy song. Say I not well ?—
Speak I your mind, good friends, shall we entrust
Our suit to Sweno ?

HAROLD. Ay, 'tis wisely thought,
For liquid verse, with melody combined,
Finds the straight road, through many winds and turns,
Unto the female heart.

STARNO. And, good my lord,
Brave Harold deems that Sweno's harp may gain
The power, which Orpheus exercised of old,
Over the fierce, and savage, of the earth,
And tame these wilful beauties, against whom
His courage is not proof.

ERIC. Oh let us fight
With our own weapons, if we'd gain the day;
I'd never trust another's tongue, or sword
In love, or war—but least of all in love !

THOR. (*smiles*). That was a lover's answer. Thy
fond heart,
Led captive, by thy fancy, I presume,
Is fixed on charms ideal.

ERIC. No, my lord,
You do me wrong ; I was the first to draw
The happy lot that gave the foremost choice ;
Nor do I care to doubt that your commands
Will have due weight with your submissive bride,
And that her friend, the lovely dark-eyed girl,
Who at Cuthullin's banquet sat beside
Her royal mistress, will attend her here,
The fairest in her train.

THOR. I give thee joy
Of this thy daring project ! it were well
To speak of tongues as weapons ; yet beware !
'Twill be a sharp encounter. Well I marked
That flashing eye ; the spirit well discerned
That fed its brilliancy.

STAR. (*laughing.*) Oh, be advised,
Dear Eric, be advised ; the king's first thought
Was prudent in its wisdom. 'Tis the means
To gain a patient hearing—think on that !
It is a fortune that befalls few men,
To play the speaker's part.

THOR. Hark ! heard ye not
A strain of fitful music, borne along
Upon the evening breeze ? By heav'n, the moon
That shone so brightly till the appointed hour,
Is now o'ercast, and clouds are gathering round.
There is a storm at hand ! Hark ! nearer still—
They'll reach the shore in safety, for I hear
The plashing sound of oars. It is my bride
Courtiers, resume your places, and recal
Your king's injunctions ; let no voice be raised,
Or step advanced, until—you know the sign.

THE SONG OF THE BRIDAL TRAIN.

Across the stream of molten light,
Her way the swift bark cleaves,
For Melcha, with her maids, this night
The home of childhood leaves.
A weeping bride, the moon appears,
Wrapt in her silv'ry veil,
But fairer far—despite her tears—
The Star of Innisfail !

Like yonder orb, her early hours
Were tranquil and serene :
But darkness now round either lowers,
And storms will intervene.
Lo ! through the clouds of adverse fate
The queen of night looks pale,
And no less pensive, calm, sedate—
The Star of Innisfail !

For grace and favour, at her hands,
The vanquished victor pleads,
Beneath whose sword her native land,
Her hapless country, bleeds.
And Melcha's plighted word is gained—
Such wooing must prevail—
The stranger has a bride obtained :
Sweet Star of Innisfail !

She comes, a silent, pensive bride :
But soon her fame shall rise,
Like beacons, spreading far and wide,
And kindling to the skies.

While Erin, hapless, and forlorn,
Her Melcha's name shall hail,
Upon the breath of ages borne—
Sweet Star of Innisfail !

Onward we come—a faithful band,
Devoted to her will :
She leads us, with a gentle hand,
To future good or ill.
The goal is gained—the voyage is o'er,
We furl the snowy sail,
Our lovers wait us on the shore—
Sweet Star of Innisfail !

[*The music ceases. A loud clap of thunder is heard, and a vivid flash of lightning is reflected on MELCHA, and her Train as they enter. She advances, followed, at a little distance, by MORA ; the rest, closely veiled, remain in the background. THORGILL advances to meet the Princess.*

THOR. Oh, deem not, lovely Melcha ! all my vows
Shall be thus ill observed. I promised thee
A silver path unto thy future home,
And lo ! the thunder burst upon thy head ;
The moon has vanished, and the rain descends
In angry torrents.

MEL. (*sternly.*) When the breast is torn
By inward tempest, we rejoice to find
Some sympathy in nature. Pitying heaven,
Seeing my utmost need, hath lent me, tears.

THOR. Mine be the grateful task, all trace of grief,
All cause of sorrow, to remove. And yet

Of comeliness, which is the spring and source
Of dire misfortune to myself, and all
I hold most dear in life. It seems my fate
Diff'reth in little from the destiny
Which set its burning seal on Erin's brow,
And gave her up to sorrow. She is fair,
And fondly loved by those, whose birth, and creed,
Warm heart, high spirit, beauty, courage, truth,
With mercy tempered, make them well deserve
The highest recompense. Alas ! alas !
Her hands are bound ! the hand that should reward
Is bound in chains, and she can only mourn
With feeble lamentation, for her charms
Have caused, that she should be desired of those
Beneath whose hateful yoke she struggles still—
The tyrant—alien—infidel—whose power
Is based in cruelty, whose title-deeds
Are traced in guiltless blood !

THOR. Melcha, no more !
Too meekly have I heard thee ! Look around—
Recal where thou art standing, nor presume
To tempt my fury by such idle words,
Before th' assembled court. What is thy aim,
In braving one, into whose power this night
Thou art delivered ?

MEL. (*with majesty.*) Thorgill, I am come,
The messenger of truth. My feeble voice,

That pleaded vainly in a selfish cause,
Shall advocate a higher theme to-night.
Think not thy menaces have power to daunt:
What should I fear—what is there left on earth
For me to dread? There's nothing like despair
To teach the timid, courage! I'll not yield
In fearlessness to thee, though 'twas thy hand
That sowed these seeds of daring, in my breast.

[*She pauses, and then adds:*

I had a country, at whose name my heart
Swelled high with pride, till the destroyer came
And humbled both. Thorgill, I had a king,
Who learned his lesson from the king of kings,
Beneath whose sway was peace. I had a home,
A calm and holy refuge from the storm
Of sorrow and of sin, that raged without.
I had an aged father . . . in whose sight
I was as cherished as the poor man's lamb—
And thou hast spared thy wealth, to take of his.
Thorgill, I had a lover, in whose soul
The noblest qualities that could adorn
A hero and a man, had made their home!
The hateful vow that bound me, bound my lips
To silence—and I heard that noble suit——

THOR. (*bitterly.*) As well became a monarch's promised bride—
In silent indignation? Well, proceed!

Th'oration must conclude : the longest day
Will have an end, and when the evening storm
Hath burst upon our heads, we have good hope
The night may close in beauty. Well—say on :
For these stern charges would apply to all
Those daring spirits who invade a land,
To reap its choicest fruits, or rob a home
Of its bright ornament, to cheer his own.
What are the gifts I offered in exchange
For all these early joys ?

MEL. (*proudly.*) A stolen crown,
Struck from Cuthullin's head ; a hand,
Red with the blood of countrymen, and friends ;
And a foul passion, which thou dost presume
To christen Love !

THOR. (*angrily.*) 'Tis enough, enough !
What, if I let thee flutter in the net,
Before I lay my hand upon my prize ?
It is that in these struggles thou art fair,
And that I love to mark thee ; yet beware !
For all the fowler gazes calmly on,
He is thy captor, and this feeble wrath,
Which cannot set thee free, may weary him
Beyond endurance.

[ERIC has stolen round to MORA's side, unperceived of the King.]

ERIC. Beauty, thou art mine :
Wilt learn to love me ?

MEL. Beloved companions ! throw aside the veil :
Your Danish lovers will not brook delay.
Will ye confess such eagerness can scarce
Compete with yours ? See how they crowd around !
Stretch forth your hands to greet th'expectant throng.
Unveil the faces which have never yet
Had cause to blush at gaze of mortal man ;
Trample the flowery wreaths beneath your feet,
For laurel crowns sit better on such brows.
Off with the vain disguise ! my word is pledged,
And I've fulfilled my trust. King Thorgill, say,
Are not thy Danes, the flower of all thy court,
Proud Lochlin's * chivalry, well matched this night,
By Melcha's bridal train ?

[*As she concludes, they advance, throw off the long veils and crowns, and appear young warriors lightly clothed, and armed, FEARGUS and RANDAL at their head. The former attempts to reach the King, the latter ERIC, to rescue the Princess, and MORA. General mêlée and confusion.*]

FEAR. Death to the Danes ! Erin and Melcha !
Strike !

No mercy will we give, or ask, but death !
Erin, and Melcha ! Strike !

[*He endeavours to reach THORGILL, but is borne away by the press.*]

THOR. (*grasping MELCHA fiercely by the wrist.*) Ha !
Traitor, ha !

Thou, thou, at least shalt dearly pay the cost !

* The ancient name for Denmark.

Treason without ! let the alarum sound,
Arouse those slumbering guards ! Close up the doors !
Fly, Harold, to the postern-gate, and line
The shore with warders. Starno, is there aught
On earth, you claim at Thorgill's hands, now, now,
Do me good service, and preserve your life,
To be rewarded !

STA. (*grappling with DONAGH.*) But my Lord, in vain
I strive to reach your side. Alpin is free !

THOR. Young Alpin—bear her hence unto the
tower,
And let her be secured, for now, indeed,
I prize her life far, far, beyond my own.
Accursed cowards ! has a panic seized
Upon ye, one, and all ? Half of my crown,
To him, who saves my bride !

[ALPIN darts forward, but is intercepted and cut down by
FEARGUS, who attacks the King.

FEAR. That will I do,
I will preserve them both, thy crown, and her
Who ne'er shall be thy bride, and yield them up
Unto Cuthullin in thy very sight.

[*He rescues MELCHA.*

Fly ! Princess, fly !
Take Mora hence, you know the signal well,
The pine-torch blazes at the open door . . .
Another moment it may be too late.

THOR. Starno—on your allegiance—Eric, guard
The open door—cut off their flight—strike down
The men who guard them ! two such hostages
The day may yet be ours. Stand, cowards, stand !
Are your arms palsied ? are ye not four men
To every foe ? or are two trembling girls
Less scared than you !

FEAR. (*to MELCHA.*) Fly ! fly ! our fears for thee
Distract us, and unnerve . .

MEL. Come, Mora, come !
Thou'rt free ; thy hand in mine ; Randal has cleared
The path, and Donagh now the entrance guards.
Our duty is not finished—Courage, on,
I will support thee—I am strong indeed,
Tho' my heart sickens at the flow of blood !

[*Exeunt hastily.*]

SCENE II.—*The exterior of THORGILL's Palace.*

*Sounds of strife above, and figures seen moving at the window.
The Moon is shining on the Lake, a Boat at some distance ;
on a small rock by the shore MELCHA has planted the torch
and stands beside it with MORA. Fires are blazing on the
surrounding hills.*

MORA. Oh God ! I cannot bear this dread suspense.

Why, Melcha, didst thou drag me from the spot
Where I could gaze on both ? with sick'ning heart,
And eyes made dizzy by the gleaming swords ;
Yet I could watch them. Oh ! I never knew,
At least—I never thought, what awful work !
What horrid ghastly sights ! what fearful cries !
Went to make up the sum—when we exhort
The men we love, to daring deeds, misled—
Caught by the empty glitter of the name :
Melcha, we do forget that glory's built
On broken hearts, and mangled forms.

MEL.

Be calm—

Be calm, dear Mora ; 'tis an awful time,
And we must look beyond the present hour,
To nerve our spirits.

MORA. (*distractedly.*) Melcha, it is well
For you to speak—you, in whose breast the love
Of country has usurped all nearer ties ;

You look upon the future ; I, alas !
Hang on the present—that 's the only sense,
That 's left me unimpaired. I have the power
To grasp the present, and to know, and count
All that is staked upon the issue. Thou !
What is't to thee if Randal's blood be shed,
So Erin be avenged ? if Feargus' life
Be sacrificed for freedom ? Woe is me !
I cannot lull my woman's heart to rest,
With such heroic strains.

MEL. (*soothingly.*) I did not look
For this wild terror. Mora, until now,
Thou wert so fearless, or at least so calm.

MORA. As calm as thou wert, Melcha, till I saw,
A thousand deaths, like demons hov'ring round
Those cherished heads. 'Tis easy to be calm.
When all we love are safe.

MEL. Oh ! trust their care
Unto the heaven that smiles above us ; read
Good omens in the placid sky ; the storm
Has passed away ; the moon is shining fair
Upon my father's bark.

MORA. I will return,
Melcha, I will return ; what care I now,
If the whole way be carpeted with blood,
And strewn with ghastly corpses ? I shall know
If *they* be living yet—if aught remain
To make me cling to life ?

When love and vengeance meet in close embrace,
The bliss of such an hour. What are the lives
Of a few countrymen, compared with all
The rapture and the triumph that I feel,
While thus I twine my arms around thee? Ha!
Why dost thou tremble? there's no cause for fear,
And nothing daunts thee! Thou, who art so brave—
Oh, how I love thee! hast thou not deserved
The love I freely offer? Come with me!
There is a place of refuge for us yet.—
Eric, bring on thy senseless captive. I
Will claim good Starno's aid, to bear away
This living booty!

MEL. (*still grasping the rock.*) Father! where art thou?
Wilt thou not save me? Feargus! Randal! Friends!
Is there no hope?

THOR. (*bitterly.*) Does it not dawn for thee,
In thy fond lover's eyes? Hark! how they strive,
And chafe, and fret, above, and little know
The man they have not missed from out the strife,
Is conqueror here below.

MEL. (*raising her head.*) I fear thee not!
Thou art beneath my fear. I do despise—
I do condemn—I do abhor thee so—
There is no room for fear. What, if I fall
A prey to dastard cruelty? My name
Will still be honoured; 'tis not in thy power

To bring abiding shame . . Posterity
Will be my judge ; and grateful Erin's tears
Efface the transient stain on Melcha's fame !

THOR. This strength is more than human. Drag
her down !

Upon the rock, our footing is not firm.

[MELCHA with a violent effort extricates one hand, with which
she seizes the torch, and throws it into the lake.

MEL. Virgin, to thee ! a helpless virgin cries !
Mother of Heaven have mercy !

[THORGILL and STARNO drag her down ; exit ERIC, bearing
MORA. The vessel nears the shore ; CUTHULLIN, with
many followers, springs on land, and strikes down STARNO.

CUTH. Thou art saved !

Let go thy brutal hold.

[MELCHA is rescued.

Look up, my child !

I've lived to save thee.

MEL. Phelim, Murtough, fly !

By yonder secret path, pursue with speed !

Mora was carried hence. Hark ! hark ! above

Our friends are hardly pressed.

CUTH. (*to his soldiers.*) Haste to their aid !

They're but a handful to a host of Danes.

Go and conclude the work they have begun,

And be the castle fired. Leave me to deal

With Thorgill here alone. It is my will.

[*Exeunt Irish Soldiers. The Kings fight.*

THOR. Thou hast a long arrear of gratitude.
A moment more, thou hadst incurred a debt
Which even strokes like these could never pay.

CUTH. Melcha, fear not, my child! the spirit's
strong,
Altho' the arm be weak.

[*He falls; re-enter the Irish, headed by FEARGUS.*]

MEL. Too late! Too late!
Ah, woe is me! Feargus, my father's slain!

FEAR. Fear not, a passing hurt, he will revive,
To joy in our success—the day is ours!
And not one Dane survives to bear the tale,
Or warn his countrymen to shun the fate,
Prepared for all invaders! (*He perceives THORGILL*) save
indeed,
Th'accursed spring of all. Load him with chains—
Disarm him of the sword, he never drew,
But in a hateful cause.

[*His orders are obeyed.*]

Speak, speak, my liege!
And cheer your daughter's heart.

THOR. (*bitterly.*) Oh! let me speak;
My heart swells high with joy, and must o'erflow.
I am avenged! that was a mortal wound,
And my good sword hath done the service well.
What care I for your fetters! What are now,
Life, safety, kingdom, crown, or fame to me?

I do defy ye all. I am avenged
On Melcha at the last ! I hoped indeed
To bow that lofty head with shame—to quench
The vestal fire within those brilliant eyes,
And stamp eternal blushes on her cheek :
Next in succession to this thwarted hope,
Comes the delight of planting seeds of woe,
And dark remorse, that will bear endless fruit
Within her breast. This, Melcha, is the end
Of thy grand enterprise ! Nay, droop not thus !
Remember what thou art—what thou hast done—
'Tis but another life—an old man's life.
Look round upon the flames that circle thee ;
Think on the ghastly inmates of my home !
This is thy work ! this is my recompense—
Who would believe, in gazing on that form,
It held a soul so masculine ? but thou,
Oh ! thou art one to dare and do ; for whom
All that is terrible in woman's sight
Hath charms, so thy great purpose be fulfilled.
I give thee joy ! thy name will live beside
The Roman Brutus—thou hast sacrificed
Thy father to thy country. 'Twas thy hand,
Not mine, that orphaned thee. Melcha, look up !
Raise thy head proudly ; dry the tears that shame
An Amazon !

CUTH. Ah—heed him not, my child,
My blessed child ! Let not his impious words

Have power to wound thy spirit. Weep no more !
Dost thou not see he glories in thy tears ?
On his devoted head the curse will fall.
Thou, who wert ever gentle, till he came
And woke the hero spirit in thy breast,
Ah, weep no more ! How should he know the calm,
The peace, the joy, that fills thy father's breast ?
Art thou not saved ? Is not our country free ?
What now remains for me to do on earth ?
The sun performs his task, runs his career,
And then below th' horizon sinks—and thus
I vanish from this world, to rise again
Upon another . . Feargus, come thou near,
For I have that to say which must be said.
My life is ebbing fast. Is Mora saved ?
Oh Heaven ! could I forget in selfish fears,
The fate of that fair child ?

[MORA, who during the scene has been brought in by RANDAL, to whose arm she still clings, looks round.

MORA. Blest be the power
That did preserve me, and the arm that saved.
I closed my eyes on hateful, glaring looks—
Upon a fearful scene, and opened them
To find myself at home !

CUTH. Blessed change !
Yet far more blest my destiny will be,
If, in the Christian's hope, I close my eyes

To open them in Heaven. Melcha, my child,
Feargus and Mora, and brave Randal too,
Draw nearer yet, I would my words were heard
By all alike—e'en by the cruel man,
Who, 'mid the ruins of his fortune, finds
Solace, in all the sorrow he has caused.
It is my wish his life be spared awhile,
To prove—to all still smarting from the wounds
His cruelty has dealt—the wolf, at last,
Is taken in the toils. My friends, the work
Is now completed : for the Danish homes
Are flaming to the skies. We've burned their nests—
'Twas Thorgill's* counsel once—our country's free !
And Melcha's bridal night will long remain
A landmark in her annals—a bright page
In Erin's proudest records . . I am faint,
And weary, overmuch . . Melcha, my child,
I never strove to school thy heart, or bend
Thy wishes to my own, yet it would cheer
My parting spirit, did I know thee bound
To one who'd cherish—one who would protect
Thy youth and beauty—in whose matchless love
Thy sire were better spared . . Feargus, my son,
I know thy heart—there 's none on earth but thee
Worthy to wear my crown, and win my child !

* Alluding to the advice Thorgill had given the King, to rid himself of some birds of prey, that built near the palace, by burning their nests.

FEAR. Oh, speak not thus, my liege ! Such words
as these—

Dear as they are—must bow me to the dust,
Beneath a sense of my unworthiness :
Oh, speak not thus, lest Melcha should bestow—
From filial duty, or from gratitude,
(Of which she spake without a cause but now),—
That which I spurn, from either source : for love
Like mine, can only be repaid by love !
Fear not, I'll be her friend ; I will resume
The place of brother, till her choice be fixed
On one more blest ; and then I will be gone.
Melcha, I do adjure thee, veil not, now,
Thy real feelings to thyself or me ;
Nor let th' emotion—which has merely sprung
From the prolonged excitement of the hour—
Assume the form of love, to dupe both hearts
A little space. It would be worse to dream,
And then awake : to find that we were bound
By every tie, save that of sympathy.
Oh, I would rather lose thee from my sight
For ever, than to see thee day by day,
And know thee all mine own—except in heart.
Speak to thy father, Melcha, let thy words
Be true as ever—'twere an awful thing
To answer falsely to a dying man.
Say, Melcha, canst thou love me ?

CUTH. (*feebly.*) Thou art blind
To call for words.

RAN. Ay, blind indeed !
Wouldst thou be answered, clasp her to thy breast,
And gaze that earnest question in her eyes !
Then Feargus, trust me, all the fault is thine,
If those bright mirrors do not give thee back
The image, that's engraven on the heart.

THOR. Oh, cruel beauty, thou art hard to win!
Yet thou must yield at last; and by this choice,
Prove thyself all superior to thy sex—
Their weakness—vanity—ambition! Thou,
Thou must prefer this foundling—this poor youth—
This man at arms—before a monarch!

FEAR. Peace !
Wert thou not chained and fettered, like a brute,
I'd strike thee to the earth ! Dear Melcha, speak—
It would be cruel mercy to deceive—
Confirm this blessed hope : or say, at once,
Thou canst not love me !

[MELCHA, who has been bending over her father, raises her head with a look of indignation, at THORGILL's speech.

MEL. Yet . . I pray forgive
My tardy answer. Feergus, here is death—
'Twere hard to think of joy.

CUTH. (*in a dying tone.*) Ere 'tis too late
For thy fond father to conceive thy words—
Melcha—reply.

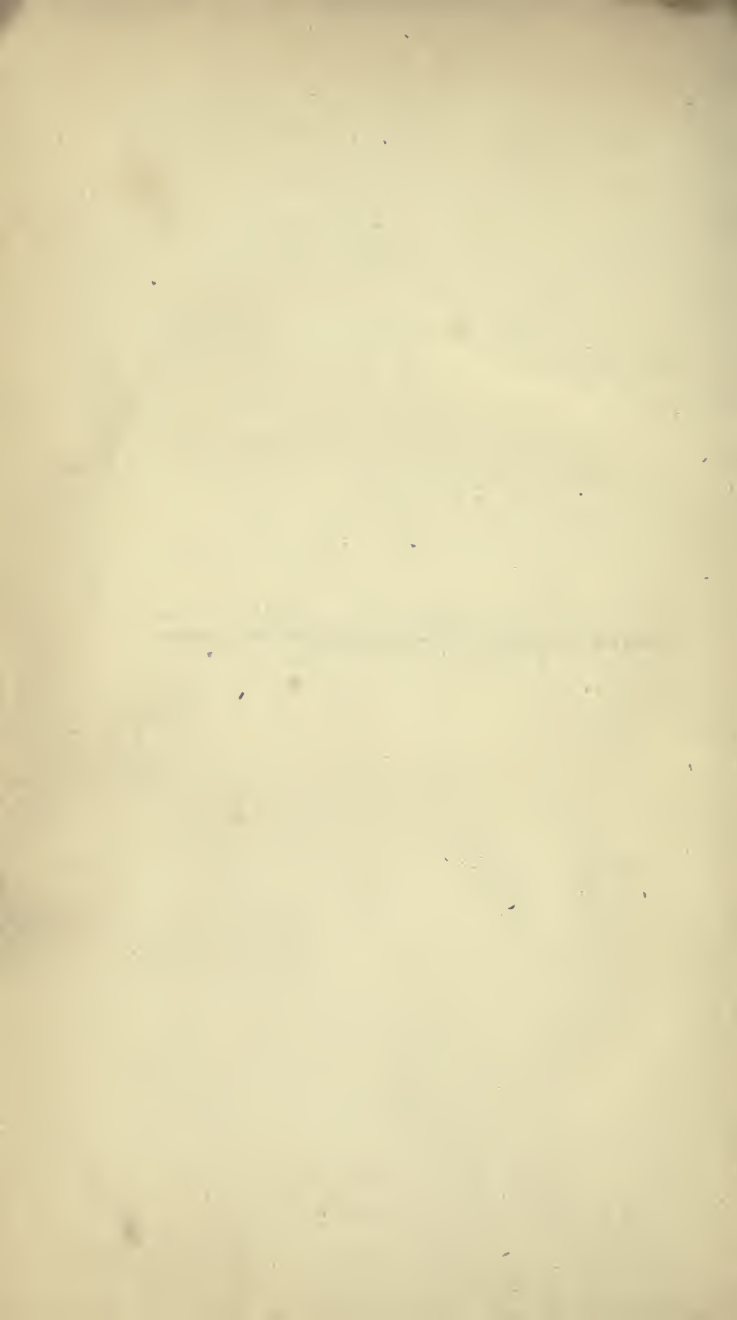
[*She looks round, observes THORGILL's mocking glance bent upon her, and starting up, she casts herself on FEARGUS's bosom.*

MEL. My life shall answer thee !

[CUTHULLIN *raises his hands, as if to invoke a blessing, and then falls back into the arms of his soldiers. At the same moment the flames burst from the castle ; and FEARGUS is urging MELCHA to embark as the curtain falls.*

THE END.

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